

## ABSTRACT

### **RESULTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TURNAROUND STRATEGIES FOR THE MAQUOKETA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH BASED ON NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT**

by

Jeffrey M. Dadisman

The purpose of this dissertation was to build upon previous studies that had used Natural Church Development as an intervention tool to promote health and growth. I consulted dissertations from the past eight years. I made adjustments to the methodology based upon their findings and recommendations for further study.

Christian Schwarz's Natural Church Development (NCD) focuses on eight central quality characteristics. All healthy churches demonstrate these eight at some level. This study used the NCD questionnaire as a tool to evaluate the level of health for the United Methodist Church of Maquoketa, Iowa. Eligible members took the pretest and posttest surveys. Implementation of recommendations from ChurchSmart Resources occurred between surveys to improve the church's greatest weakness, need-oriented evangelism. Worship attendance increased during the treatment period as leadership implemented strategies to improve our minimum factor. The survey results verified Schwarz's connection between health and growth in this local ministry setting.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
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Doctor of Ministry

by

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To the members of First United Methodist Church of Maquoketa, I express my appreciation to you for being willing participants in this stretching process. My hope is that we will realize a mutual blessing in the years to come. The Holy Spirit is the one who pours new wine into new wineskins—may we be ready for what is to come.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Susan, and family for the extra measure of patience they have extended to me while I was working on this project. Susan, you know how much your daily encouragement meant to me. Thanks for believing in me and cheering me on. We can truly relax and celebrate this summer. When the kids invite me to jump in the pool in the backyard I promise to say yes more than I did last year. ☺

## CHAPTER 1

### PROBLEM

#### Understanding the Problem

In May 2005 I was invited to preach at my home church. It is a small United Methodist church in the rural community of Colo, Iowa. I had only attended Sunday worship there once in the eighteen years since being ordained as pastor. I was not prepared for the change or perhaps I should also say lack of change. Some things had changed dramatically but other things had not. I had listened to the stories my parents shared of people coming and going over the years. On this Sunday I was very conscious that those leaving, dying, or having dropped out vastly outnumbered the new faces present. The worshipping congregation that had seen an average high of 150 each Sunday years before had now dwindled to an average of sixty-eight each weekend. As I surveyed the congregation, I could not help but note how many people were still sitting in the same places, just twenty years older. Three high school classmates and their families were the only individuals from my generation. My four children were the only other youth present. As I tried to reconnect with an older member I had sung beside in choir as a teenager, he was bemoaning the loss of many previous members. I had to inform him, though, some of those who were in the choir that day were new people. In fact, the director was a new member and in her thirties. For them, I pointed out, the choir was an open door for new people to come into the church and find fellowship together on their journey of faith.

In an article of *NetResults*, author Jim Caprell, begins his comments about the current state of the church by citing the second law of thermodynamics. The theory says that everything in the universe is affected by the natural process of atrophy. The

“everything” that runs down, according to this theory, includes people, machines, and churches *if proper care and attention are not given* (3). George Barna states, “The vast majority of Christian churches in America are either stagnant or declining. Relatively few of the nation’s 300,000+ congregations are increasing the number of people (in worship attendance) by at least 10 percent a year” (*User Friendly Churches* 15). According to George G. Hunter, III, as many as 80 percent of churches in the United States are either plateaued or declining (*Leading and Managing a Growing Church* 118). The American church is drastically in need of renewal.

Concerning the topic of decline, Darrell L. Guder et al. maintain that one of the areas in which the church struggles is with forms of traditional worship in which the symbols have been disconnected from their context and meaning (2). According to church consultant Lyle E. Schaller, a number of general factors can hinder churches from growing, including increased complexity of the pastoral role, the institutional resistance towards change, and the lack of leaders who are able to help bring about transformation. This lack of adaptability is occurring within a rapidly changing culture and makes the matching of pastors with congregations increasingly complex (*Interventionist* 11-12).

### **Context of Study**

The Iowa Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church is seriously wrestling with the effects of churches that are plateaued or in decline. A revealing list of figures was given in the 2005 statistician’s report at the June session of the Iowa Annual Conference. Rev. Charles Smith, the Conference Treasurer, began with this statement:

One of the ways we know redemption is occurring is when a person stands before the congregation and answers in the affirmative the question, “Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in His grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which

Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?” In 2004, the congregations of Iowa received 3,734 members by profession of faith. That is 681 more than we lost by death. [Still],... as a redeemed community, the Conference ended 2004 with 194,307 members, a decrease of 939 members. (*Iowa Conference Journal*, 2005 335-36)

These declining figures are not unique to the United Methodist Church. They are representative of what all mainline denominations are experiencing in the United States. The following information reveals the urgency of this study as one looks at the worship numbers and the membership trend in Iowa over the last decade.

In looking at statistics for the last ten years, Smith found of 850 Iowa United Methodist congregations, 304 received less than twenty members by profession of faith, which is an average of less than two new members in this category each year. Tables 1.1 through 1.3 reveal how Iowa congregations are doing overall in new Christians received, membership changes, and worship attendance (*Iowa Conference Journal*, 2005 336).

**Table 1.1. New Christians Joining Iowa United Methodist Congregations (2004)**

Number of Congregations	Professions of Faith over the Last 10 Years
38	None
69	1 to 5
60	6 to 10
137	11 to 20
391	21 to 99
155	More than 100

**Table 1.2. Membership Changes in Iowa United Methodist Congregations**

Number of Congregations	Change in 2004 Membership
288	Increase
125	Reported no change
9	Did not report
428	Decreased

**Table 1.3. Changes in Worship Attendance in Iowa United Methodist Congregations**

Number of Congregations		Change in 2004 Worship Average
	288	Increase
	125	Reported no change
	10	Did not report
	427	Decreased
Total	850	combined attendance was 69,301, down by 2,621 people

On 5 March 2006, I received an appointment to the First United Methodist Church located in Maquoketa, Iowa. It fits the profile of a plateaued and declining congregation. These terms describe a church that has experienced zero increase or a decline in average weekly attendance at worship over the past five years and has recorded few or no professions of faith over that same time period (Borden 6).

The membership trend at the United Methodist Church in Maquoketa for the past ten years has moved up and down from 522 in 1995 up to 551 in 2002 down to 538 in 2004. Average worship attendance has dropped 16 percent from 210 to 176 over that same time period (“Church Statistical Profile”).

Weekend worship attendance is the best single indicator of decline or growth for a church; therefore, the drop in worship attendance is of greater concern than the net gain (3 percent) of sixteen new members. The denomination measures both statistics, indicating the value in knowing both levels for a church, but worship attendance is the principal indicator of a church’s size according to consultants with the Alban Institute (Mann 5). The primacy of worship attendance over membership holds true for three reasons. First, as the mission of every United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ (*Book of Discipline* 87, 127, 351), membership represents an initial step of commitment and the strengthening of an individual’s relationship with a gathering of



local believers. Discipleship does not stop with a commitment to membership. Growing Christians will also begin to develop a sense of where God is calling them into ministry or mission. They will go on to find other ways of participation in the life of the church, places for spiritual growth, study, and service, but attendance in worship will remain a priority as well. Second, worship attendance is the most visible indicator of an individual's weekly participation in the life of the church. Third, the membership total for most churches includes a fairly high percentage of inactive members. Therefore, I would say church membership is important, but the average worship attendance for a congregation is a better indication of the ongoing growth in discipleship for those gathered in that place.

The Maquoketa United Methodist Church is located within a relatively stable farming community that gained 166 people and grew 2 percent in population from 1990 to 2005. During that same period of time, the U. S. as a whole grew by 17.8 percent. In contrast, during those same fifteen years, the United Methodist Church in Iowa dropped in membership from 221,071 to 194,307 (12 percent). The Iowa Conference also dropped in average weekly worship attendance 15 percent during that fifteen year period, from 81,545 to 69,301 (*Iowa Conference Journal*, 1990 646; 2005 336). During the next five years, Jackson County is projected to lose 0.8 percent of its population ("Demographic Information").

When I went to visit this church for the first time, the leadership did admit to high levels of conflict and falling attendance over the last several years. My district superintendent offered the chance to have church consultant Doug Anderson come for a two-day, on-site visit with the church before I began. I readily accepted. I found his

observations very relevant to this project, an accurate report of the current circumstances, yet hopeful for the future. I drew the following insights from his thirty-page report.

Doug began with an affirmation and then an observation about the presenting issue. This United Methodist church has been strong for many years, but it also has had an ongoing pattern of conflict. The church often does not seem to deal very well with conflict when it happens—sometimes it centers on the pastor; sometimes conflict is around worship styles. In the end, no matter where conflict begins, it seems to focus solely on the pastor, resulting in the pastor leaving and the congregation feeling hurt and upset. In the midst of the most recent conflict, the church was also dealing with financial difficulties due to a drop-off in giving and attendance (which Doug said is not unusual in a time of conflict).

Conflict has been an ongoing, periodic, regular part of the life of this church for a long, long time. As I listened to people in the community talk, I found that other churches in the area have had a history of conflict, too. Those disagreements have included the issues of contemporary and traditional worship. The community as a whole has not been able to deal with conflict in a healthy way. In this church's context, Doug found that much of the accountability for resolving issues rested on the pastor, which is not unusual, nor is it particularly healthy. This loss of shared responsibility is due to a lack of clear and focused purpose on which to center energy and ministry, so the church becomes clergy and staff centered by default. Unfortunately, the church did not significantly change the patterns of behavior and lack of communication that were causing the conflict when the pastoral change occurred four years ago; therefore, another change occurred at the beginning of 2006.

My predecessor left six months before I arrived for health reasons. The leadership of the church decided not to have an interim pastor come from January to July but instead planned for a team of lay speakers to provide the preaching for Saturday and Sunday worship services. Additional laity filled in the areas of visitation and pastoral care, specifically a team of nine Stephen Ministry ministers. Other folks helped with the ministry in significant ways as well. This season of not having a pastor was actually the best thing that could have happened to the church at that time—from Doug’s perspective. I heartily agree. He believed the break from having a pastor caused (even forced) the leadership and the congregation not to focus on the pastor but to focus instead on getting involved in ministry, which is a better, healthier, and more effective focus for the congregation and leadership as well. People began to get more involved and grow in their faith and commitment as a result. The conflict dropped off so dramatically that when Doug came he encountered little tension in the church following the recent season with no pastor. The comment was heard, “When you are the one who did something, you can’t just go complain if it didn’t work. We stopped complaining [about what the pastor had done] because now it was our ministry. If something wasn’t right we could change it ourselves” (Anderson 1-2). I think they have arrived at a significant moment of self-discovery, and I am excited to be their new pastor.

### **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to determine if the application of research based on the eight quality characteristics of healthy churches as defined by Christian A. Schwarz in his book *Natural Church Development* and the implementation of changes stemming from this research would renew the life of the Maquoketa United Methodist Church.

### **Research Question #1**

What level of church health currently exists in the Maquoketa United Methodist Church as measured by the Natural Church Development survey?

### **Research Question #2**

Is there a positive relationship between worship attendance and the implementation of NCD strategy pairing ministry strength and minimum factor based on recommended ministry interventions?

### **Research Question #3**

What confounding variables have potentially impacted the observed changes in this church's health and growth?

### **Definition of Terms**

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

**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 focus on releasing the “divine growth automatisms” by which God grows his Church. Schwarz discovered these growth automatisms or principles from empirical research, from observing parallels between the natural world and the spiritual world, and from studying Scripture (*Natural Church Development* 13). He develops these principles in his book *Natural Church Development*.

Schwarz is head of the Institute for Church Development based in Germany. He and his colleagues studied over one thousand churches in thirty-two countries on five continents. This international study was conducted from 1994 to 1996 to answer the

question, “What church growth principles are true, regardless of culture and theological persuasion?” (*Natural Church Development* 19).

The **eight quality characteristics** identified by Schwarz, when taken together can be used to diagnose the health of a congregation. The Church Development Institute identifies these principles as empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. The goal is to promote harmonious interplay among all eight of these characteristics, thereby raising the overall level of congregational health. Proponents of Natural Church Development emphasize church health as the key to church renewal. These leaders believe if one raises the quality and health in a church these improvements will also increase the chance that the church will experience quantitative growth.

**Church health** is defined negatively as the lack or low presence of healthy characteristics. It is defined positively as the balance or “harmonious interplay” of Schwarz’s eight quality characteristics. Certain minimum levels of these characteristics are implied as necessary in order for the church to be healthy and to enable growth.

### **Description of Project**

This project is similar to several recent dissertations making use of NCD and church health concepts and is intended to build upon their findings. Four studies were consulted: “The Relationship between Church Health and Church Growth in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church” by Scott B. McKee, “Evaluating the Impact of Christian Schwarz’s Eight Quality Characteristics on Three Plateaued and/or Declining Churches and the Involvement of an Outside Coach” by William Scott Borden, “A

Strategy for Transforming St. James United Methodist Church: A Study in the Relationship between Church Growth and Church Health” by David Wesley Kofahl, and “Strengthening the Vitality of New Hope Free Methodist Church through the Natural Church Development Approach” by Linda J. Adams.

This study is unique in that I chose to draw a random sample from the active membership of the church instead of the sample of convenience recommended by NCD. As a result, the findings were strengthened. I did not have to allow for the dynamics brought to the table by a group who had volunteered, whereas all of the other dissertations I consulted asked for volunteers as the NCD guidelines suggested. A random sample is more powerful because the results are more representative of all the active church members. They can then be applied to a broader sector of the church than the results derived from a sample of convenience. A random sample is also better because no allowance had to be made on account of a self-selection bias, which happens with volunteers (Patten 74-75).

After a season of getting acquainted in my new church, I began to plan towards the first survey date in January 2007. The Natural Church Development questionnaire (NCDQ) was administered to measure each of the eight quality characteristics. When the results were received, our leadership team went on a retreat to discuss the findings and strategize around applying their strengths to the area of greatest weakness. After a twelve-month period, the questionnaire was administered a second time to determine any changes in the eight quality characteristics and measure the results of this season of change and growth. The entire project took place over a period of one year.

## Methodology

This evaluative study looked at the effect of a strategic ministry intervention following the initial administration of the NCD survey. The NCD survey was the diagnostic tool that revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the church. A “treatment” was designed, based on this data, and summarily implemented towards the goal of bringing renewal in the First United Methodist Church in Maquoketa. The total process can be diagrammed as follows (Wiersma 146):

**O → X → O**

The NCD survey was administered at the beginning and end as represented by the “Os” in the diagram. The “X” represents the twelve-month time period between each survey in which a strategic effort was made to raise the minimum factor by bringing the church’s strengths to bear in that area of community life. The “X” is preceded by a two-step process of receiving the results in a retreat setting and then going forward to program for change in the areas needing attention. The aim of each survey was to assess the health of the church according to the eight quality characteristics, comparing the starting level with the ending level to determine whether application of the church’s strengths alongside the area of weakness made any significant difference.

Each set of questionnaires was sent to NCD to be tabulated. The results of each survey provided a snapshot of the church’s health at that moment. At the close of the second session, the survey participants were all given a form with a mix of open-ended and objective questions for which they were asked to give a written response.

## **Population and Participants**

The population in this study was defined as active members of the congregation of the First United Methodist Church in Maquoketa, Iowa. A notice about the coming survey was mailed to those individuals from the church membership who would be eligible to participate in the coming project. The focus of the letter stressed the importance of their support. A random sample was drawn from those eligible. This sample involved about one-fourth of the eligible population as participants. The thirty people who took the questionnaire became the participants for this study.

## **Instrumentation**

The primary instrument for this study was the Natural Church Development questionnaire developed by Christoph Schalk, a German social scientist and psychologist, in partnership with Christian Schwarz of Germany's Institute for Church Development. The survey is an inventory containing ninety-one questions that asks the participant to grade the health of the church on the basis of eight quality characteristics: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structure, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. The results were tabulated through a computer program, and a complete "church profile" was mailed back to the church from ChurchSmart each time. The profile provided suggestions for raising the minimum factor.

## **Variables**

The independent variable in this study is simply the intervention or turnaround strategy implemented based on the level of health revealed after the first survey. This



strategy is effectively the “treatment” designed to raise the church’s minimum factor by drawing upon the church’s strength, as revealed from the testing results.

Dependent variables would include the level of health in each one of the quality characteristics, the amount of change over the twelve months of the study as reflected in the post-study survey results, and the resulting growth as reflected in the average weekly worship attendance.

### **Data Collection**

The NCD survey is an inventory of ninety-one questions. (Permission was received from ChurchSmart Resources to list these questions in Appendix B.) The survey was administered in a group setting in January 2007 and January 2008. The thirty participants were invited to gather for a meal and told that the purpose of the questionnaire was to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the church. After this brief explanation, they completed the survey simultaneously. One year later, at the close of the second time of testing, each person was given a form listing several questions. Their written responses gave data to evaluate how the NCD concepts were being understood and to provide one source as to outside factors that might have influenced any measured change, whether positive or negative, in the church’s health.

### **Delimitations and Generalizability**

This study focused on the congregational health of the First United Methodist Church in Maquoketa, Iowa, from January 2007 and January 2008. The project measured church health indicators rather than typical growth indicators, such as average worship attendance, church membership, or financial giving totals, by focusing on Schwarz’s eight quality characteristics of church health. My expectation was that quantitative

growth would be one of the results of qualitative growth, barring extenuating circumstances or unforeseen problems.

This assessment necessarily involved a random sample of people involved in the ministry of the church and those knowledgeable about the current health of the church. In fact, the NCD parameters actually asked that those taking the survey demonstrate a fairly high level of commitment and participation. Outsider perception of congregational warmth (i.e., loving relationships) and inspiring worship might have been very different as well if people along the margins had been included in this project.

The findings of this study have direct implications for the future of the First United Methodist Church in Maquoketa. Generalizations about the usefulness of NCD for other congregations within the United Methodist tradition, churches of other sizes or makeup, or churches of other traditions can only be made with careful judgment. My hope is that other congregations will choose to try these tools to further God's kingdom in their midst.

### **Theological Foundations**

In this study I chose to anchor a "theology of renewal" in the doctrine of the Trinity. As described, the United Methodist churches in Iowa are following the same downward trend seen in other mainline denominations in America. A significant percentage are fading, declining, and, for all practical purposes, dying on the vine. I believe renewal is possible, and towards this task I name as my goal the rebuilding of a healthy, dynamic congregation marked by a wholehearted love for God and warmhearted love for all people. Howard A. Snyder in his book *Signs of the Spirit* declares that "[n]othing less deserves to be called 'renewal'" (300).

When writing about church renewal, a variety of phrases come to mind. Renewal sometimes comes as *revitalization*: the recovery of vitality and vigor. Nehemiah led his people to rebuild the city wall and its gates for protection. They overcame great odds and refused to give up (Neh. 2:17-18). Renewal sometimes comes as *rebirth*: a new beginning or renaissance of faithful activity and mission, a second birth. This possibility is seen in Jesus' invitation to Nicodemus (John 3:1-9). *Webster's Dictionary* captures a facet of renewal in the word "Regeneration." This word suggests a revival of spiritual life. Renewal often involves *restoration* to health. One example of this form of renewal occurs in 2 Kings 5:1-27, when Naaman is healed of leprosy after he washed in the Jordan River. The ultimate form of renewal involves *resurrection* from the dead. Ezekiel the prophet sees the valley of dry bones come to life (Ezek. 37:1-14), and the Gospels tell of the resurrection of Jesus. Renewal can also occur with the *rejuvenation* of first love (Rev. 2:4-5; The church at Ephesus is told what to do to regain its first love). The final form of renewal is seen in the word *rekindle*, to reawaken or relight the flames of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-21), reminiscent of when the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost. Each of these terms carries a helpful nuance that, when combined, round out what is intended by the expression "church renewal."

Renewal can happen in a church. Leadership plays a part in making renewal possible by strategizing, working long hours, giving time to plan and pray, but in the end Ron Crandall concludes renewal is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit:

We are only privileged to play a part, but it is an important part. Yet, as co-laborers with God, "neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.... For we are God's servants, working together" (1 Cor. 3:7-9). (24)

Snyder pushes a little deeper into the question of God's sovereignty. While renewal is God's move, he insists it is okay for us to seek change in the church:

The church which assumes it can do nothing to renew itself—that says it must simply wait passively for God's sovereign intervention—is fundamentally no different from the individual Christian who abdicates responsibility for his or her own spiritual discipline and growth. (*Signs* 300)

Snyder wants readers to understand that every church has what is necessary to grow; in fact, he is right with Schwarz and all others who advocate for the principles of church health when he says growth potential is in the genes of all churches. The local church is the body of Christ. The Spirit of Jesus is present, urging believers forward, breathing life into his people, and guiding them towards health and vitality. The key to renewal is more a matter of identifying obstacles and removing hindrances than finding a successful formula.

### **Overview of Study**

In Chapter 2, selected literature and research pertinent to the study are reviewed. The biblical concept of renewal in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity is developed. Biblical metaphors for renewal from the Old and New Testaments are explored. The eight quality characteristics of church health as identified by Natural Church Development are presented in detail and the critiques of NCD research are discussed.

In Chapter 3, the problem and purpose of this study are restated in summary form. The design of the project, the research methods, and method of data analysis are explained in detail.

In Chapter 4, the findings of the study involving the First United Methodist Church of Maquoketa are presented including the results of the two surveys and the

analysis of the responses from the debriefing questions collected at the end of the one year survey period.

In Chapter 5, three major findings and practical implications that flow from those results are reported and discussed. Suggestions for further study are also included.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE**

The stated purpose of this project is to determine if the application of research based on the eight quality characteristics of healthy churches as defined by Schwarz in his book *Natural Church Development* and the implementation of changes stemming from this research would renew the life of the Maquoketa United Methodist Church. Towards that end, this literature review begins by developing a theology of renewal as supported by the doctrine of the Trinity. Two biblical metaphors for renewal from the Old and New Testaments provide the scriptural foundation for this research.

Further review covers the history of how the Wesley brothers promoted renewal in England in the 1700s and what has happened in the United Methodist denomination down through the years. Additional sources establish the necessity of renewal within each generation. The survey of history also includes material on the church growth movement and the more recent emphasis or shift to church health.

Finally, the study introduces and reflects on each of the eight church health characteristics as used in the model of Natural Church Development. The research for this project focused upon the use of the NCD survey tool developed by Schwarz as a method of intervention and possible stimulation for church renewal.

No study of church renewal would be complete without some anticipation of resistance and difficulty. Renewal by definition implies a change in focus, and change only endures as transitions are successfully negotiated. This literature review concludes with a discussion of change theory and principles of conflict management. All of these

components are focused towards the goal of beginning a successful turnaround in the ministry of a local congregation.

### **Limits of the Literature Review**

This chapter seeks to give an overview of the key issues and history surrounding church renewal. A part of this chapter is given to exploring church growth, but the main priority will be given to understanding church health. The amount of literature and biblical insight in these two areas is enormous, so I chose to limit this review to a brief summary of related sources and then highlight the use of NCD as a tool for bringing renewal in a local congregation. The concluding sections acknowledge some weaknesses within the NCD model and possible adjustments that have been offered as correctives by other pastors and Christian leaders.

### **Theology of Church Renewal**

In this study I intend to anchor a “theology of renewal” in the doctrine of the Trinity. In order for the Holy Spirit to begin a new work in most churches, they have to acknowledge a need for God’s help. The losses being experienced in most local churches are part of a discouraging (and ultimately, disastrous) trend. Surveys show that the average American believes he or she is slightly above average. What goes for the individual seems to be true for church as well. Most local congregations see themselves as above average, too, but the statistics available on the American church reveal an alarming tendency—85 percent are caught in a downward spiral and many churches are still in denial (Nelson and Appel 2). The first step in renewing the church is acknowledging the desperate need and realizing what is at stake if nothing changes.

Two trends occur within the overall decline of the American church that seem so subtle most congregations are not aware they are even happening. The first loss concerns the generation of youth. Barna reveals that 81 percent of “twenty-somethings” have some level of church background. A portion of these individuals will make the transition to adulthood with faith intact. One-fifth will maintain a level of spirituality consistent with their high school experience, but 61 percent remain disengaged from any church congregation well past the college years. This group is not attending worship, reading the Bible, or praying as they reach age 29. This last statistic represents a significant failure for the youth ministry of the past era (Barna Update). Each generation seems to lose a little larger portion of its youth. The cumulative effect will soon produce a state of total disregard for Christianity similar to what can be seen in England and Europe. Tory Baucum articulates a second and equally dangerous trend. He makes a forecast about the future of the church in North America. While Christianity is growing in Africa, South America, South Korea, and parts of Asia, the North American church does not follow their patterns. The Western church is tied to the influence of Europe. North American seminaries are based upon the work of European theologians. The dominant trend, and the precedent of church history, is that the Western church will follow the spiritual climate of Europe if something is not done to reverse the downward slide.

### **Biblical Metaphors of Church Renewal**

Snyder sets up his theology of church renewal by describing two primary ways from which renewal is usually approached: the *institutional* perspective and the *charismatic* perspective. From the institutional view, the organization of the church exists to provide a stable place within which salvation is extended to the world. Renewal



becomes a spiritual question that applies to individuals and believers, not to the current structures of the church. Renewal movements are greeted with suspicion and often hostility, creating much tension as they call into question the status quo of the church (*Signs* 270-71).

On the other hand, the charismatic view sees the church as the body of Christ. This view wants to make sure the current expression of the church is dynamic and alive. It is not very concerned about history or what God has done in the past. In order to have life and power, it needs to maintain a clear channel for God's grace to flow into the community of believers. Champions of this view typically appeal to the picture of life in the church of the New Testament as presented in the book of Acts. Spiritual vitality is evaluated against that ideal, and when decline is seen, renewal is sought for the whole community, not just on an individual level. If the forms or structures of the church are obstacles to renewal, those who support this viewpoint would seek to change them. Scripture provides metaphors for renewal, two of which I explore next (Snyder, *Signs* 271-75).

**Stump and shoot metaphor.** "Then a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom" (Isa. 11:1, NAB). This image merges the best of institutional and charismatic and allows the strengths and weaknesses of both sides to be taken realistically. The metaphor of the stump takes seriously the history of what God has done in the past by showing that the shoot and stump are connected to the same roots. The renewal desired by the charismatic view springs from the remnant of past traditions. It builds on all that has gone before.

This metaphor links the institutional church with the renewal movement by recognizing that “for whatever reason, the old tree has lost its earlier vigor and may appear dead, but that it still has life and, therefore, hope” (Snyder, *Signs* 275). Snyder concedes that not all renewal movements are equally of benefit to the larger expression of the church, but because institutions do tend to drift towards plateau, stagnation, then decline, some form of renewal is necessary in each generation. This image from the Old Testament provides the first biblical base for renewal.

In looking at the context of this key verse, the preceding verses of Isaiah 10:33-34 add to the drama of this biblical image:

Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, lops off the boughs with terrible violence; the tall of stature are felled, and the lofty ones brought low; the forest thickets are felled with the axe, and Lebanon in its splendor falls.

Assyria was the instrument of judgment God had used to chop down the forest of Israel’s pride. Isaiah spoke to that verdict in 6:13. Here the divine axe falls again, and the proud, majestic trees of Assyria are brought low. Isaiah declares they would be like a tree cut down at the height of its glory. “All that is left in the ground then is the mere stump of one single tree. Isaiah 11:1 begins a poem referring to such a stump” (Widyapranawa 67).

One author suggests that “the imagery of a tree is chosen because it is connected with the idea of a tree of life, which served as a symbol for the monarchy” (Wildberger 470). The tree image is helpful in capturing the scope of God’s plan for Israel. Both judgment and salvation are planned. As author, Kirsten Nielsen states, “The tree must certainly be destroyed, but it can sprout again” (71). She goes on to explain that the olive tree was the most important fruit tree of the region at that time. The significant characteristics of an olive tree include its ability to send up strong shoots from vigorous

roots and its reliability in producing large quantities of fruit each year. As an evergreen tree, it is a suitable image for a nation that was to be vigorous and enduring (76-77). The critical role of all fruit trees was seen in the wartime prohibition against destroying such trees. God commanded his people about this practice in Deuteronomy 20:19:

When you are at war with a city and have to lay siege to it for a long time before you capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them. You may eat their fruit, but you must not cut down the trees.

That rule may have worked within the warring factions of the Jewish nation, as long as all sides were committed to God's way, but one has a sense that enemy nations did not regard war as a time to fight fairly. Cities and landscape were both burned to the ground.

In a personal interview, Dr. Sandy Richter shared how this metaphor of stump and shoot captured the essence of what was happening for people of faith as Jewish history transitioned from Old to New Testament. The people of God were stagnant. They had lost focus as a worshipping community and were losing faith in God under the pressures of persecution, war, and ongoing painful circumstances. The vital elements of worship, community, and personal practice of faith were missing.

This circumstance was not new. This crisis was the pattern that had repeated itself throughout the Old Testament. Only now, Israel found itself at a point lower than ever before, reduced to a mere stump. Isaiah's choice of word picture was reinforced for all to see. When Israel finally lost the battle, its major cities were sacked. The enemy soldiers further crippled the economy by cutting off all the fruit trees as they left the area. Anyone traveling the countryside would be reminded of their lost prosperity. The hopeless state of affairs would be visible for all to see. The food supply would take a long time to recover. The economy would take even longer. This one act essentially crippled the region for

another decade or more. The stumps in the field were long-term reminders of the nation's defeat. Spiritually, Israel felt as if God had abandoned them when ravaged by the defeat of battle. Most Israelites lost all hope for the future because of these difficult circumstances. The stump appeared to signal that the people of God had arrived at a dead end (Richter).

Isaiah, on the other hand, saw the stump as a symbol of hope, a sign of God's provision for their future. Judgment had come, yet even as deserved as it was, God would not leave them in despair. On the surface, a stump appears to represent the end of all that was, but even here God is at work. The One who created trees to sprout, grow, mature, and fall also provided for a pattern of renewal in creation. The stump is the source of nourishment for the new life that springs up in each shoot. The source of strength for a tree is in its roots. The connection between stump and shoot is strong as each is dependent upon the other. The shoot gives new purpose to the stump (Kaiser 255).

This biblical image holds promise for the church today. The pattern of birth, growth, plateau, and decline repeat for every congregation. Circumstances can bring a church low, so that the only thing remaining is the stump, a shell of the former vitality and life-giving tree. Isaiah foretold the messenger of renewal for God's people. The Jews believed their Messiah would one day come as a shoot springing up from the stump of Jesse. Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophet's words. For the church today, in need of renewal, this rich metaphor can again hold the promise of hope and new life (Richter).

**New wine and new wineskins.** In the New Testament, Jesus is shown preparing his disciples for the new things God is about to do in their midst. He frames this

discussion into a parable that reminds the believer God is a God of *newness* and the application of the gospel is always new in its effect:

And He was telling them a parable: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, ‘The old is good enough.’” (Luke 5:36-39, NAS)

Jesus is speaking of new cloth and new wine. He makes a common sense observation that the new does not usually mesh with the old. While this reality is known to be true with material things it is also true in the spiritual realm. The new wine is representative of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The wineskins are the traditions that result when the gospel touches human culture. Jesus poses a key question concerning what happens when new wine is poured into old wineskins. The old skins will burst because they are not able to contain the fermenting pressure of the fresh wine. He was predicting what would happen to the old Jewish forms of faith when Christianity began to grow. The Jewish wineskins burst just as he said. As the Church spread into the Middle Eastern regions, the previous Jewish traditions could not contain the dynamic burst of energy from this new move of God.

Snyder makes an observation from his knowledge of Church history: “Every age tastes the temptation to forget that the gospel is ever new. We try to contain the new wine of the gospel in old wineskins—outmoded traditions, obsolete philosophies, creaking institutions, old habits” (*Radical Renewal* 15-16). When the old wineskins begin to restrict the essence of the gospel, the church must face this reality. If a church cannot provide a container for the new wine, the old skins will rip open. This burst can be a good

thing because the resulting freedom allows the power of the gospel to go forth and bring new life, but almost always those in positions of power resist new traditions.

The gospel is doing new things in this day. It is still bursting old wineskins and pouring out to do its renewing work in the world. Snyder states that not only has this bursting of old wineskins been the pattern in the past, but “[i]n fact this is more true today, and in more places, than any time in history” (*Radical Renewal* 16).

This parable provides a secondary teaching. If the first is that new wine will burst old wineskins, the second concerns the *necessity* of having wineskins. The new wine needs to be carried in something. One can observe that wineskins will not last forever. They were not intended to become something sacred on their own, for in time they must be replaced. The gospel itself creates much change; therefore, new wineskins must be allowed to develop periodically and be renewed repeatedly.

When I conduct a study of Scripture, I include a survey of the surrounding passages when developing a sense of the historical context. In looking at the previous sections of this gospel, one notices that Luke has assembled a series of controversial stories in this fifth chapter. The note of conflict sounded after the healing of the paralytic repeats with increasing passion. Jesus clashes with the Pharisees and teachers of the law each time. The Pharisees begin to grumble about whether or not Jesus can forgive sins in Luke 5:21. Then they complain about Jesus eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners in Luke 5:30. This third dispute begins around the issue of fasting. The passage in focus “involves a contrast between Jesus’ disciples who were not fasting and the practice of fasting of both the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees” (Stein 184). Luke does well to show the gap that exists between the new and the old (i.e., between the

coming of God's new kingdom inaugurated by Jesus and the old Judaism of the Pharisees). Luke's record varies from the way Mark presents this story in that Luke employs a repetition of the popular phrase "eating and drinking." In so doing, he links this account more closely with the preceding one in which Jesus' disciples were "accused of eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:30). In Luke 7:34 these two criticisms are brought together when Jesus is described as a friend of tax collectors and sinners and as a glutton and drunkard" (Stein 185). In Luke 5:34 Jesus essentially declares an exemption from fasting for his followers on the basis of it being inappropriate for their present context. Expressions of sadness and sorrow through fasting are as out of place for them as if they were at a wedding. The meaning associated with fasting at that time did not fit with the mood of joy that comes from being in the bridegroom's presence:

These parallel stories ... illustrate the distance between the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus and the religious perceptions of his contemporaries. His message, we understand at once, is the new garment and new wine.... [It is] worse than useless to try to match it to the old forms of piety and politics. Such a compromise between the *novum* and the conventional leads to the loss of what is new and the destruction of what is old. Specifically, one cannot fit this Gospel to the outcasts with its accessibility for all humans, within the perceptions and precepts of a separatist piety. (Luke Johnson 99)

A key to understanding this passage is to notice that these verses are dominated with an obvious reverberation of the words "new" and "old." As the pattern plays out, the reader is struck by the incompatibility of new and old. In fact, author Joel B. Green calls it a "motif of incompatibility" (249). The old garment and new cloth used to patch do not match. New wine cannot be stored in old wineskins without bursting them. The old and new ways cannot be mixed without bringing harm to both. Just as new wine must have new skins, new ways must have new containers. This necessity does not mean that some

of the old forms of piety, such as fasting, or old forms of worship cannot continue, but it does mean they are seen differently.

Jesus talks about something that was not done: “no one pours new wine into old wineskins” (Luke 5-37). Someone foolishly must have tried to use this shortcut and found out what the result would be. When the new wine goes through its initial burst of fermentation, it expands in the container, causing an old skin to burst because it would not have been able to swell with the expanding contents. This mixture of old and new ruins both wine and skin.

Wineskins were normally made from sheepskin or goatskin. The neck area of the animal became the opening of the container. The body of the animal was skinned, and after the hair was removed, the hide was cured so that the skin would not affect the flavor of the contents. Finally, it was sewn together to make the container. Over time it would age and become stiff, hard, and even brittle (Bock 520).

Fred B. Craddock summarizes these verses: “Jesus tells his critics that his disciples can no more join to old rituals their new sense of life in the age now begun than one can successfully tear up a new garment to patch an old one or put new wine in old wineskins” (80). New cloth and new skins are pliable and able to change form to match the dynamic vitality of the new contents. In the same way, Craddock suggests, Christian rituals of worship and forms of activity must be allowed to take new shapes so they stay appropriate to the liveliness of God’s fresh activity in each new age. In a survey of Christian history, one sees that most generations have not been able to hear this word as a continuing need. Craddock offers this insight:

Rigidity sets in, often for the worthy motives of maintaining identity and defending the faith. Then when this text is rediscovered, its



implementation meets with great resistance and division occurs. Under such circumstances the matter of appropriateness is often lost, while “old” and “new” are trumpeted as values in themselves. (80)

Craddock’s words reflect the very real struggle continuing in many churches today. The Holy Spirit is assisting rediscovery of this text and applying its message to the current state of the church and meeting great resistance at all levels. Whether intended as humor or simple irony, in Luke 5:39, Jesus said, “And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, ‘The old is good enough.’” If this verse was representative of the Pharisees’ commitment to traditions of the past, as some suppose, the irony certainly continues within human nature today.

In a personal interview with Snyder, he shared some reflections about the images of “new wine” and “wineskins.” He suggests this metaphor can help sort out what needs to happen today in the church. Insofar as the new wine is representative of change, change *can be* good. Past patterns in the church need updating from time to time to stay fresh and vital. In worship, following the same pattern every Sunday can get dull and boring. On the other hand, if the worship format is always changing, the constant state of flux can be very unsettling. Old wineskins can provide necessary stability and be a positive factor. He acknowledges the tension between old and new but believes that both can exist together, saying, “Vital churches find a way to keep the old and new together in a dynamic way” (Personal interview). He believes the tension can be navigated with creative and discerning leadership. The pastor must champion and favor renewal, while at the same time ministering to all members.

## Renewal and the Trinity

For Christians, including the doctrine of the Trinity is an essential step towards understanding how renewal comes to pass. It lays a foundation for a proper understanding of the priority of relationships among those leading the church. As Keith D. Cowart says, “[T]he Trinity, particularly as understood in the writings of such Trinitarian theologians as Colin Gunton and John Zizioulas, reveals that the very nature of God is defined by the relationship that exists among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (7). Colin E. Gunton captures the essence of divine community in the following thought:

God is no more than what the Father, Son and Spirit give to and receive from each other in the inseparable communion that is the outcome of their love. Communion is the *meaning* [original emphasis] of the word [God]: there is no “being” of God other than this dynamic of persons in relation. (10)

If leaders want to understand more fully the ingredients of renewal, they need only notice the pattern of the Godhead. The Trinity is a divine example of the importance of loving relationships and intimate community.

The doctrine of the Trinity has its roots in the story of creation. This historical understanding of the nature of God is connected to the very belief that humans were created in the image of God. For many this concept is difficult to understand, but the plural pronouns in the text of Genesis reveal a heavenly community of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit actively working together from the beginning. “Then God said, ‘Let *us* [emphasis mine] make man in *our* [emphasis mine] image, according to *our* [emphasis mine] likeness’” (Gen.1:26, NAB). Community is integral to the essence of what God is like, and shortly after these verses God is seen declaring that relationship is at the heart of what God intends for humanity as well. The only aspect of creation that was “not good”

is the aloneness of the man in chapter two (Gen. 2:18). I believe the divine intent for humans is to be people in relationship. The doctrine of the Trinity is the way the church in history sought to explain the relationships within the Godhead. More specifically this doctrine describes God as a community of love in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This doctrine is a way of answering the question of who God is. The relational nature of God is what draws people together with other believers. These truths are evident in Scripture. Thaddeus Horgan writes this about the communal nature of God:

It is the will of the triune God to create and recreate humanity and to draw all into the people of God (Isa. 49:6; I Pet. 2:9-10), to unite all in the body of Christ, and that God works to implement this aim through the Spirit (cf. Gen. 1:2, 2:7; Isa. 11:1-9; John 14:26; etc.). God's Spirit, which has been active from the beginning of creation ... [has] again and again raised up leaders for God's people. (qtd. in Barr and Yocom 12-13)

One of the results of God's action is that renewal becomes something more than an individual quest. It becomes a dynamic that draws believers together to change and impact the corporate life of the church.

This Trinitarian line of reasoning begins with the presence of plural pronouns in the creation story of Genesis and sees a multi-personal dimension within the Godhead all throughout the Bible. Someone could object and say I am reading my belief in the Trinity back into the text. Other interpretations of the plural pronouns in Genesis are possible. I remember the first time I noticed the plural pronouns in the opening stories of Genesis and asked my college professor a question about these pronouns. I was told they could be two things: the use of "us" and "our" could be a reference to a heavenly council of sorts (God and the angels) or an example of the kingly, "royal we," but no reference was made to a possible connection with the doctrine of the Trinity. My college professor also suggested the idea of a heavenly court, which might be a parallel to the other ancient

Middle Eastern beliefs about the gods who gather for council in the skies. Robert Morey provides some scholarly insights around these issues from his study of the Old Testament. Morey rules out the reference to a heavenly court by citing that the plural pronoun for God was used in connection with a singular noun for “image.” Humanity was not patterned after the twin images of God and the angels. One image is being used as the design; that image is God’s. He then takes the reader back to the inception of “*pluralis majesticus*,” a concept that became popular in nineteenth century debates between Unitarians and Trinitarians. It was revealed as a hoax in 1891 when Richard Davies was able to show that the royal style of reference was not something seen in Scripture. Instead it was a rather modern idiosyncrasy being read back into the text by those desiring to discredit Trinitarians (Morey 90-95). Morey strengthens his arguments by showing that the two most popular names for God in the Old Testament are both plural nouns (92-93).

### **Trinity and Leadership**

When leading renewal, the Trinitarian nature of God gives a pattern for how God intends the body of Christ to work. Many church growth authors make the point that change requires someone with vision and passion to drive it forward, but over and over the literature admits to mistaken attempts at trying to lead alone. Wayne Cordeiro insists on the following as the bottom line in pastoral leadership: “*You can’t do it alone* [original emphasis]. If you want to be a successful leader—if you plan to have successful ministry—then you must develop not only your gifts but also the gifts of those around you” (11). Barna says an effective turnaround pastor must be a team builder, able to pull together a committed core to help lead in ministry. A half dozen people can make an

incredible difference when overcoming obstacles and maintaining momentum (*Turn-Around Churches* 56). The communal nature of God models a team approach. This emphasis is a truth that God has designed into the fabric of healthy ministry and one that becomes more evident each time someone burns out from trying to function alone. Gordon Fee cautions against operating as a “Lone Ranger” and recommends that Christian leaders seek out community for encouragement to keep leading and accountability to keep growing into the image of Christ (138).

Snyder writes that he learned the value of a leadership team from experience. His team was not without problems, but in the long run he built a team that had more impact than a single dynamic leader. He also affirmed the place of women serving alongside men. He assessed his own team experience as providing more strength, balance, and sensitivity to the needs of the church precisely because men and women served together (*Signs* 308). The image of God is inclusive of both male and female as Genesis tells the story (Gen.1:27, NAS—in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them), and renewal comes as the leadership of the church reflects this image, too.

### **Renewal and Social Justice**

Many times great emphasis is given to renewal in the life of the individual and the church. Personal holiness is seen as essential for spiritual growth. Attention is given to personal reading and application of Scripture and the practice of spiritual disciplines that enhance a personal relationship with God, but John Wesley is often quoted as saying “There is no holiness without social holiness” (321). A person’s relationship with God needs to have impact upon their relationships with others as well. More importantly is the aspect of vital faith the book of James names as the link between faith and good works:

“So you see, it isn’t enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn’t show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless” (Jas. 2:17, NLT). James describes good works as serving the needs of the poor, the orphans, and widows. “Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans and widows in their troubles” (Jas. 1:27). Putting faith into action is an important factor in renewal.

The prophets, especially Jeremiah, focus attention upon the goal of a just community. Willie J. Wessels writes, “In a context of renewal, people filled with the Spirit should allow the Word to influence and renew their ethical convictions” (qtd. in Wilson 92). He insists the concept of renewal contains the implication that believers will see obedience to God in the arena of social justice as part of their commitment to faith. Jeremiah regards social holiness as more than a call to harmony within the community of faith. He sees the issue as God’s call to the community of faith to take responsibility for the needs of others.

In Jeremiah 22, the prophet speaks out against the evil deeds of those who followed Josiah as king of Judah. Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, only reigned as king for three months before being taken into exile. He is judged for starting to build his palace upon the backs of unpaid laborers. Josiah also enjoyed the finer things in life, but he was known for doing what was just. Josiah defended the cause of the poor and needy when he ruled as king. Jehoahaz is accused of going after dishonest gain, shedding innocent blood, oppressing of the poor, and committing extortion (Jer. 22:13-17). The implication of these verses is that God judges the community and its leaders by how they treat those in need.

This passage in Jeremiah makes possible the inference of certain ethical requirements for leadership. The leader needs to be one who advocates for the rights and position of the weak within the community, region, or country. Wessels also points out “[w]hile the maintenance of social justice and a climate suitable for correct and reasonable conduct is the prime responsibility of the leadership, it is also the co-responsibility of every member of the community” (qtd. in Wilson 108). Believers have a role in renewing the leadership within a community and then holding them accountable for restoring the disruption caused by injustice. If leaders do not address the needed issues, members of the community have a responsibility for acting directly.

Snyder comments that renewal in the church has usually included a move of God among the poor, the masses, and the alienated (*Radical Renewal* 49). He reaches back into history to note that while the Reformation call of “salvation by faith” awakened hope among the poor and oppressed, the movement remained mostly the church of the middle class and nobility. The church of this age is challenged to do better on behalf of the lower classes and the poor. Radical renewal requires that believers respond to the heartbeat of God in Scripture. The Bible is continually including the poor, the widow, the orphan, the alien, the needy, and the oppressed within the scope of God’s care. The Bible declares that the Lord loves the poor and will not forget them in their time of need. A leader God has chosen is one who “will rescue the poor when they cry to him; he will help the oppressed, [those] who have no one to defend them. He feels pity for the weak and the needy, and he will rescue them” (Ps. 72:12-13). God has been a “defense for the helpless, a defense for the needy in distress, a refuge from the storm” (Is. 25:4, NAS). One can see in the ministry of Jesus a concern that parallels the compassion of the Old Testament. If

one simply notes where Jesus spent most of his time, one can see that he acted on the belief that the poor were more ready and able to understand and accept the gospel. Those who stumbled when presented the gospel were most often the rich, the sophisticated, and the intellectuals. The major challenge Snyder names for the church today is to go beyond treating the needs of the poor as a social program for distributing food and other material goods. The good news is for them. They are more open to the grace of God than all other groups. The church needs to be doing evangelism and planting churches among the poor. The cutting edge for the church has always been with those on the margins. The most creative ministry happens in the lower strata of society. All throughout history the church has grown most rapidly among the poor. From this perspective, Snyder insists, the church needs the dynamic life that comes when the poor are included (*Radical Renewal* 43). The inclusion of the poor and attention to the marginalized are key components of the renewal movement John and Charles Wesley set in motion across all of England. Snyder writes, “There is no combination more potent in transforming society than biblical evangelism coupled with biblical social concern—the joining of Old Testament prophet and New Testament evangelist” (182).

This component of renewal has great implications with regards to any ministry of outreach and hospitality towards the aliens and strangers. Families are immigrating to America for the opportunity to work. International students are coming to study at American universities. God is bringing new neighbors to this country who are more open to the gospel than many realize.



## Renewal through Community

“True Christian fellowship—what the Greek New Testament calls *koinonia*—is the Spirit’s gift to the church” (Snyder, *Radical Renewal* 83). Fellowship is part of the process of building authentic community, but it is lacking in all too many churches according to Snyder. It is a necessary ingredient for renewal to take place. Keith Miller put his finger on what happens in a normal church gathering, revealing the fact that many people come to the church with a spiritual longing and leave with their thirst unsatisfied:

Our churches are filled with people who outwardly look contented and at peace but inwardly are crying out for someone to listen ... just as they are—confused, frustrated, often frightened, guilty, and often unable to communicate even within their own families. But the other people in the church look so happy and contented that one seldom has the courage to admit his own deep needs before such a self-sufficient group as the average church meeting appears to be. (22)

All emotional needs cannot be fully satisfied in the larger context of community worship. *Koinonia* appears and flourishes only in settings allowing discussion and interaction. Small groups provide a safe place for *koinonia* and authentic community to grow. The informal context of small groups is what gives freedom for the presence of the Holy Spirit to operate and bring spiritual growth.

Lesslie Newbigin asserts that the impact of community in presenting the gospel cannot be over estimated. In fact he believes the primary mode of impacting the world was revealed in the actions of Jesus. Jesus did not leave an instruction manual or write a book but formed **a community** that turned the world upside down in the years following his death and resurrection. His community began as a small group that with missional thrust went into Jerusalem, to Judea, into Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.

These are the defining characteristics he said this community should model to bring renewal and new life for the people of God:

- It should be a community of worship and praise. This focus is in contrast to the modern tendency to apply a hermeneutic of suspicion to every human endeavor or institution viewed with reverence. Worship helps focus on the One (Jesus) who is the true anchor for a life that is sometimes tossed about by the storms that rage. One distinctive of Christian community is the shared commitment to make God the center of life instead of the human self.
- It will be a community of truth. This commitment to truth needs to be expressed with confidence within a society given to relativism.
- It will be a community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of the neighborhood. It is outwardly focused for mission and ministry.
- It must be a community in which men and women are prepared and equipped to wrestle with the issues of faith in their daily lives and on the job. It must prepare the whole people of God to be lights shining in the darkness and salt in a decaying world. They are to be advancing the mission of Christ, that of reconciling the world to God.
- It will be a community of mutual responsibility that acknowledges the cultural idol of individualism. Believers grow best into all God wishes for them when they are in faithful relationships with one another.
- Finally, it will be a community of HOPE. Our culture today contains a degree of technological optimism, but the reigning mood in most novels, movies, and Western literature is despair. The current culture will never believe that the true authority over all things is represented in a crucified man. For this reason, Newbigin suggests the *only*

*possible hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation that does believe it.* Believers must give up their individualistic assumption that faith is meant to be a private, personal matter and begin to live to be a blessing for society as a whole (227-33).

Renewal assumes an effective component of evangelism. From this discussion, the reader can see that one of the most effective contexts for evangelism is what happens in small groups connected to a larger Christian community.

### **Renewal and the Ministry of the Holy Spirit**

Having surveyed many factors that make renewal possible, the focus ultimately comes back to a total reliance upon the work and presence of the Holy Spirit. The prophet Zechariah provides a great example of this truth in his encouragement to the king of that time. The victory will come “‘not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). Renewal of the church is also dependent upon the power of God’s Spirit. It cannot be forced or manufactured by the techniques of church growth. Church leaders are partners with God in the renewal process. Leaders can prepare God’s people for the coming of the Spirit. Christian ministers set the table by preparing the hearts of God’s people to receive. In the end, renewal is a sovereign move of God to warm individual hearts and transform a community of faith into a dynamic, loving, missional church.

Steve Seamands gives a description of the Christian ministry from a Trinitarian perspective. “The ministry we have entered is the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son, *to* [original emphasis] the Father, *through* [original emphasis] the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world” (*Ministry* 10). The challenge is to orient one’s personal focus in this same way. Christian ministry is first discerning what God the Father wants

done, not allowing the church or the world to set the agenda. In the press of ministry and the never-ending list of demands, leaders can become, in Stanley Hauerwas's phrase, "a quivering mass of availability" (qtd. in Seamands, Lectures). More important than rushing through each day and doing many things for God is a heart willing to obey what God assigns to be done. Oswald Chambers maintains that "[we] slander God by our very eagerness to work for Him without knowing Him" (277). Two necessary functions of the Holy Spirit are to stir passion for the King and to help individuals or groups discern God's will.

Listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit is a cumulative process. Personal obedience is tested in the little assignments and as small steps are taken. God is looking forward to a lifelong journey in which he gets to shape believers into the image of Jesus. Fee writes of this journey as the setting in which the fruit of the Spirit is the result of "long obedience in the same direction" (112).

Jesus is the faithful example in Scripture of one who followed the will of God over his whole lifetime. He was able to know the Father's will and accomplish all that he did because of his total dependence on the Holy Spirit. His ministry on behalf of the Father would not have happened apart from his relationship with the Holy Spirit. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit did Jesus fulfill his mission on earth. The same could be said for the first apostles and the church. Before Jesus ascended into heaven he gave instructions for the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the promised power of the Spirit was poured out upon them (see Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8).

The apostles were gathered together praying on the Day of Pentecost when suddenly the Holy Spirit came upon them filling them with boldness and supernatural

power. Throughout the book of Acts, Luke describes the leaders of the church as being “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:8; 6:3-5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9). He presents this empowerment as a supernatural yet essential equipping for ministry. Seamands raises a very interesting question for today’s leaders: “If it was an essential requirement for them, is it not also for us too?” (*Ministry* 28).

Many Christians are uncertain about the meaning of the phrase: be filled with the Holy Spirit. I believe this filling is not so much a spatial metaphor as it is a description of a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit characterized by surrender and abandonment to the control of the Spirit. As Seamands writes, “[T]hough the Holy Spirit is present in all believers, in some he is not preeminent; though he is resident in all, in some he is not president” (*Ministry* 28). The old self has a difficult time giving up control, yet before one can minister effectively in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, a deeper level of personal surrender needs to happen.

Raniero Cantalamessa is a Roman Catholic priest who serves as preacher in the household of the Pope. He makes the observation that many followers of Christ in the twentieth century have experienced the thrill of the Holy Spirit filling their soul. That filling often follows upon making a simple request. Some people, though, feel as if they have fallen short of this experience but do not know why. He offers these suggestions for those who hunger and thirst for a more intimate experience of God’s presence.

First, God desires to give believers the fullness of his Spirit, but they need to expect him actually to answer if they ask. Cantalamessa gives the example of a custom in some countries in which whoever happens to come to the house at mealtimes is invited to come in and eat. The visitor is expected to graciously excuse him or herself and decline

the invitation. The host would be more than a little irritated if the guest, instead of leaving, came in and made himself or herself right at home at the table. Some people make their invitation to the Spirit in a similar way, not really expecting him to show up.

Luke gives this guidance in his gospel:

And I say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, will he give him a scorpion? No. If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? (Luke 11:9-13)

Jesus clearly states that God desires for believers to ask for the outpouring of his Spirit. If the request is genuine, one can be sure that God will answer in his own time.

Second, if a believer has made a genuine request and is waiting for God to answer, spending time with other believers who have had their own experience of Pentecost may help. They can encourage and alleviate any fears one may feel.

Third, believers need to be ready for whatever change the Holy Spirit might bring. God is not going to pour the Spirit into someone's personal life and then leave everything unchanged. Change is guaranteed. A believer's openness in essence gives God the freedom to initiate an extreme home makeover right in the heart.

Fourth and finally, God will not move in a person's spiritual life if after praying, one attaches conditions as to how God can answer, "But watch it now; nothing strange, no excesses!" (Cantalamessa 59). After all, the apostles were thought to have been drinking that first morning of Pentecost. The church cannot tame the Holy Spirit. Cantalamessa cautions those who ask of God and then at the first sign of the Spirit's work become all fearful and cry, "[N]ot like that, not like that!" (59). Then they turn and

implicate those whose prayers are being answered with signs of the Spirit's coming, "They have been drinking too much new wine" (57-59).

Just as personal spiritual renewal begins with seeking the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the renewal of the church depends no less upon the Spirit pouring out his power and love for the community of faith to experience. The church has nothing to lose. In America it is dying on the vine in many places. Now is the time for the church to call out to God in eagerness and expectation.

Some in the church may object to such talk that involves turning oneself over to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They fear offending or turning off nominal attendees or marginal participants. I remember hearing a camp director I worked with in college recommend that I ignore such objections. He would say, "This is the way to new life in Christ! How can you 'turn off' people that, for all of God's purposes, haven't been turned on yet?" I hope this study might demonstrate how the Holy Spirit can use certain tools and strategies of renewal for the good of the church.

### **History of Methodist Renewal**

Church history reveals a major shift in paradigm and structure in the fourth century. This change weakened the church by eliminating one of its two main gatherings for corporate interaction—the **small group**. In the intervening centuries, several renewal movements recovered this New Testament configuration. The Wesley brothers began one such renewal movement that eventually birthed the Methodist Church. The past few decades have again witnessed attempts to restore this small group priority to the Western church. My research on the topic of renewal was not all historic. The Beeson class of 2005-2006, an in-residence class of pastors working towards a Doctor of Ministry degree

at Asbury Theological Seminary, had a chance to observe firsthand what God is doing in the churches of Seoul, South Korea. We saw the impact of forty years of emphasis on cell groups and prayer ministry in every major denomination represented. South Korea is home to the largest United Methodist Church in the world (over ninety-thousand members), the largest Presbyterian Church (250,000 members), and Yoido Full Gospel Church (over 750,000 members). In our onsite visits with some of the pastors in that city, we heard them credit the small group strategy of Wesley for part of the “secret” of their incredible growth.

I was also privileged to attend the opening night of the ALPHA course at Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) Church in London, England. ALPHA is designed as an evangelistic outreach and serves as an introduction to the gospel for hundreds of young adults at this church each year. As people finish ALPHA they are invited to join a small group and continue learning the basics of faith. Two or three small groups gather once a month in a “pastorate” that connects forty to fifty people for a meal, worship, and a time for teaching. In contrast to the empty cathedrals we toured in other parts of London, HTB is a thriving Christian community with an average participant age of twenty-seven. After returning home, I remember thinking how ironic that an Anglican church in London was employing a similar strategy to reach people for Christ that Wesley started in the 1700s.

John Wesley was born into a time of great upheaval and social ferment in England. The country was surging into the height of the Industrial Revolution. The needs of those caught in poverty were growing. Wesley became one of the great innovators of church history, not of his own choosing but out of necessity. He was committed to the old ways and often admitted he loved the old wine best, “but if the old hinders the gospel,



then changes and innovations must be made” (Snyder, *Radical Wesley* 3). Wesley saw new wine required new wine skins, thus, the story of his life and ministry is the story of a man given to creating and adapting structures to nurture the fruit of revival.

Wesley started a massive movement that gave the gospel to the common people of England. He touched the coal miners, laborers, and masses caught in poverty. By the “late 1700s Methodists were quite simply the most disciplined, cohesive and self-conscious large body of people in England” (125). What Wesley started was, above all else, a movement of spiritual renewal within the Church of England. It was a mass movement of people coming to know the power of God and the power of genuine Christian community. By the late 1740s the people called Methodists seemed to be everywhere. This era stands as one of the primary examples of the renewing work of the Holy Spirit upon a morally decaying society.

The genius of Wesley’s ministry is seen in his organization of the movement. He spent little time planning to bring a person to Christ but a lifetime ensuring that converted sinners might grow into the image of Christ. The emerging patterns that he put in place became a system of “discipline in community” (53). Within a few years of his own heartwarming experience in 1738, Wesley had instituted the Methodist societies, band and classes, and quarterly love feasts to guide new believers into an immersion of Christian *koinonia*. This recovery of the reliance upon small groups for accelerated spiritual maturity is believed by many to be the key to his long-term success as a Christian leader.

The discipline and nurture maintained in Wesley’s system of small groups produced much fruit and a rapidly growing movement throughout the country of

England. After only thirty years, in 1768, Methodism could trace forty preaching circuits and 27,341 members. Ten years later the count had grown to sixty circuits and 40,089 members; in the next decade the momentum took them to ninety-nine circuits and 66,375 members. By 1798, seven years after Wesley's death, the totals had bumped to 149 circuits with 101,712 members (Snyder, *Radical Wesley* 54).

The majority of this discussion has been given to the person and work of John Wesley. He was the preacher and evangelist, the strategist and organizer. His brother Charles was the poet and added music to the movement to push this renewed faith into the character and soul of early Methodists. As John was the engineer for the Methodist movement, Charles represented the heartbeat. Charles wrote over nine-thousand hymns that took Christian theology and doctrine and made them accessible to the person on the street (Yrigoyen 26). Anglican preachers and theologians often presented lofty themes and high ideals. Charles used the medium of music to weave Christianity into the daily fabric of the common people. The familiar tunes he used planted Christian truth in the hearts of all who joined the movement. For poor, uneducated converts, memorizing the hymns was one way they could learn scriptural content for their newfound faith.

Students who study history have the advantage of noticing what has worked in the past and what has not worked. As John Wesley evaluated the state of the movement of Methodism towards the end of the eighteenth century, he noticed another factor beyond the demise of small groups, which severely weakened Christianity in the fourth century. "Following the year 325, the Roman Emperor Constantine bestowed official recognition on Christian doctrine, lavished honors on Christian clergy, and showered riches on the

cause of Christian evangelism. Christianity became, as a result, respectable, comfortable, successful ... and slack” (McEllhenney et al. 159).

Wesley saw a correlation between the fourth-century slackness in Christianity and the fact that the Roman Emperor had made the church successful. He felt depressed as he surveyed the spiritual plight of his own movement. Success had surely followed Wesley’s passion for souls and his work among the poor. He had taught his followers to earn all they could, save all they could, and give all they could. Most Methodists had followed their leader’s teaching on the first two points but failed at the third. Many had entered the middle class. They had become comfortable, secure and, in the end, complacent in matters of faith. In the century after his death, the power of Wesley’s movement would eventually wane as the influence of his passion was lost.

As Methodism spread across the Atlantic, the Holy Spirit fire would fan out across the new frontier, and history would see a similar pattern repeated on American soil: revival would come; circuit riders would see success from town to town; the poor would receive the gospel; disciplined living would result in material prosperity; materialism would again lull the faithful into complacency; and, the influence of the church would wane. Several spiritual awakenings would stir the hearts of the American settlers and pioneers, but succeeding generations always seemed to allow the fire to grow cold. Church historians have noted that the demise of the class meeting was in large part the factor that precipitated the decline of Methodism (Snyder, *Radical Wesley* 149).

In looking back, one can see that spiritual renewal did not come from the pronouncements of bishops or local councils of elders. History reveals that renewal comes through apostolic individuals such as Wesley. I think Wesley’s model of Christian

renewal was one that promoted church health. From the historic record of that era, evidence abounds to suggest a very strong correlation between the results of Wesley's healthy model of ministry and the incredible growth for the early Methodists, as seen in England and North America.

### **History of the Church Growth Movement**

The beginning of the church growth movement can be attributed to the ministry and lifetime work of Donald McGavran. Following thirty years of missionary service in India, McGavran launched the movement in North America in the fall of 1972. His focus was simply evangelism and missions, but those terms had been defined and redefined so many times that they failed to catch the attention of anyone anymore. McGavran created a new wave of momentum in ministry circles with the cutting-edge expression, "church growth." The newly coined phrase was intended to mean, "all that is involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship to Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership" (Wagner, *Your Church* 12). Originally targeted to assist foreign missionaries planting new congregations, the universal application of the principles being shared soon begged the question, "Why can't established churches in America grow too?" The decline of mainline churches in the 1960s further fueled interest in research that might help to turn around struggling churches. As McGavran's ideas began to catch attention across the country, he attracted the support of such influential leaders as Win Arn, Robert Schuller, Elmer Towns, Lyle E. Schaller, John Wimber, and C. Peter Wagner. Fuller School of Theology became the home of McGavran's Institute for church growth.

One of the early obstacles with which this movement had to contend was the prevalent attitude among churches and clergy that God had not called them to grow but to be faithful. In fact, many pointed to the lack of growth as evidence of their faithfulness to the hard road of Christ's calling. Some leaders were not sure the goal of growth was pleasing to God. The concern about numbers somehow seemed unspiritual. Church growth leaders went to the Scriptures and began to persuade pastors with the word of God (Wagner, *Your Church* 49). They began to emphasize the importance of the Great Commission and the obvious fact that it was not yet complete. Church growth leaders began to develop core principles to articulate better why some churches were growing and their neighboring churches were not. Pastors and leaders were then encouraged to set bold strategies for winning people to Christ and planting new churches (McIntosh 15-16).

The movement as such began to snowball as pastors of larger growing churches began to showcase their achievements at annual clergy seminars. Pastors would gather and host pastors would share their local story and methods for success with these leaders from all across the country. These events would also include workshops for other presenters and church consultants to add their insights to the mix. The momentum for this new movement maintained until the death of McGavran in 1990. The mantle of leadership then shifted to Wagner until his retirement in 1999. Since that time the popular understanding of church growth has broadened to include almost anything related to the topic of growing a church. Some lament the confusion that has resulted (McIntosh 50). As this movement enters the twenty-first century, McGavran's principles have been solidly embedded into the thinking of most North American Protestant denominations and church bodies (22).

The success of church growth initiatives has largely been measured by the belief that bigger was better. This overemphasis on numbers has been the one enduring criticism through the decades (Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift* 8-9). Large growing churches were trumpeted as models to emulate, but questions began to be asked about the quality of Christians in growing churches. As early as 1980, Wagner began to test an instrument by which the quality of a church could be measured (*Church Growth* 34-35).

Over time, cynicism has affected some church growth proponents. Simply applying the right principles did not always create the anticipated numerical growth. Snyder names a trap into which all too many pastors and church leaders have fallen. “The Great Seminar Fallacy is that one can copy in one’s own unique circumstances what has transpired elsewhere. Usually one can’t. And the attempt to do so often leads to frustration and disillusionment” (*Signs* 298). Wagner himself was part of a denominational consortium that concluded churches grow and decline as a result of the interplay of five basic sets of factors:

1. *National contextual factors*: these relate to national trends in population, attitudes, values and social conditions.
2. *National institutional factors*: these relate to policies determined on the denominational level concerning priorities of ministry, theological stance, church polity and other areas that to one degree or another affect all the churches in the denomination.
3. *Local contextual factors*: this relates to social trends in the local community, neighborhood or area where the church is located.
4. *Local institutional factors*: these are conditions that exist within the leadership and membership of the local church.
5. *Spiritual factors*: because the growth or non-growth of the church rests ultimately in the hands of God, the interrelationship between what we do and what God does is of supreme importance. (*Healthy Church* 12)

Factor #5 seems to evidence a maturing within the church growth movement. God is always the agent that causes a church to grow, and yet the reliance on human effort or self-designed programs is a temptation to pastors and leaders of any affiliation.

As stated earlier, the church growth movement is in transition. One of the results is seen in several offshoots that serve to move the church beyond the overemphasis on numbers. These offshoots create a niche of ministry options that some describe as “market-driven.” These ministries are specializing in seeker-sensitive worship or seven-day-a-week programming, while others call their program user-friendly. They explore how to reach the unchurched or how to be a purpose-driven church. Accompanying this first movement is the rise of what have come to be known as “teaching churches.” They are equipping the next generation of clergy with skills for congregational vitalization and new church development. The third movement is offering training to foster the growth of “healthy” congregations. Some leaders within the developing church health movement claim to be reacting against the errant tendencies of the church growth movement, seeking to highlight transferable principles instead of simply duplicating a successful church program from one location to another (McIntosh 78-80).

### **History of the Church Health Movement**

In the mid 1990s, leaders in the church health movement saw their work as a necessary corrective for the church growth message of the 70s and 80s. The shift to church health grew out of the concern that the church growth message had become too “technocratic” in Schwarz’s terms and had not led to any real growth in comparison to the increasing American population (*Natural Church Development* 7).

Rick Warren is probably one of the most well-known authors/speakers in this area following his success in publishing *The Purpose Driven Life*. Warren derives five dimensions of church health from Acts 2:42-47:

1. Churches grow warmer through *fellowship*;
2. Churches grow deeper through *discipleship*;
3. Churches grow stronger through *worship*;
4. Churches grow broader through *ministry*; and,
5. Churches grow larger through *evangelism* (48).

He believes that God does his part in adding growth when the church does its part by harmonizing these five dimensions or purposes. He concludes, “Church growth is the natural result of church health. Church health can only occur when our message is biblical and our mission is balanced” (49).

Stephen A. Macchia compiled a list of ten characteristics that his research revealed were necessary for a church to be healthy. His conclusions came from visiting one hundred churches representing a wide range of theological persuasions, ethnic diversity, congregational sizes, and denominational affiliations. His results also include findings from a “church attitude” survey 1,899 Christians filled out in February 1997 at the annual gathering of his organization, Vision New England (22). The ten characteristics were organized in the following way:

**Level 1: How I Relate to God**

1. God’s Empowering Presence
2. God-Exalting Worship
3. Spiritual Disciplines



**Level 2: How I Relate with My Church Family**

4. Learning and Growing in Community
5. A Commitment to Loving and Caring Relationships
6. Servant-Leadership Development

**Level 3: How My Church Ministers and Manages**

7. An Outward Focus
8. Wise Administration and Accountability
9. Networking with the Body of Christ
10. Stewardship and Generosity (23).

The above lists are representative of many other church health models (and they resemble church growth strategies as well). Many common themes can be observed from list to list. The characteristics of health have been compiled from numerous kinds of research, surveys, and experiences across the country and around the world. To polarize church growth and church health would seem to be a mistake because the current church health movement is, in actuality, building upon much research that was developed in the church growth movement. Church health is an attempt to look at church growth holistically and biblically while evaluating quantitatively and qualitatively.

For the purposes of this study, Schwarz's Natural Church Development (NCD) is explored in greater detail in the next section. NCD is the model of church health that was used as a tool for surveying the strengths and weaknesses of the local congregation in which this project was based.

### **Introduction of the Natural Church Development Model**

According to the NCD strategy for renewal, a healthy church has the presence of eight quality characteristics. They are empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships.

Schwarz refers in his book to what he calls “divine growth automatisms” (*Natural Church Development* 12). A healthy church, much like a healthy organism, Schwarz maintains, will grow “all by itself” (12). This concept is illustrated best in Mark 4:26-29:

And Jesus was saying, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows—how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops *by itself* [emphasis mine]; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

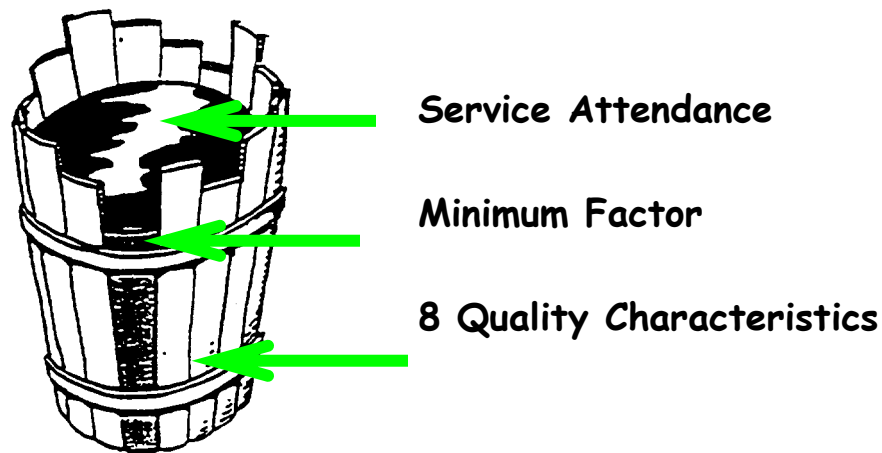
In this parable a farmer spread his seed on the ground then went to bed for the night. The seeds sprout and grow, the crop matures, and the grain is ready for harvest, all without any effort on the part of the farmer. This natural process is precisely the essence of Schwarz’s “all-by-itself” principle (12). He applies this idea to the life of the local church and believes that if a certain level of health is present in the church, the “biotic potential” resident there will begin to cause growth. Growth cannot occur beyond the level of the lowest indicator because of the active interplay between all eight areas of church health. Schwarz has designed a process to determine what he calls the “minimum factor” and a strategy for strengthening that weakness. That strategy involves using one’s “maximum factor” or strengths to assist in dealing with those weaknesses revealed by a church profile.

Schwarz keys in on this one part of the parable. All leaders have to do is bring these growth factors into balance and the resulting health will bring growth in the church. “Instead of trying to ‘make’ the church grow in our own strength (that is, with great effort), we prefer to utilize the growth automatism which God’s word shows us and which we find confirmed by our experience” (*Paradigm Shift* 237).

The goal of NCD is not membership growth or increasing worship attendance but improving the overall health of the church. The data from Schwarz’s research shows that growing churches have, on average, higher quality in all eight areas measured. No single quality can be said to produce health or growth. He insists no single element is the key to growing a church. The research again shows that the dynamic interplay among all eight components is needed. The key is found in the harmonious interplay of all eight components. One remarkable discovery held true among all one thousand churches surveyed. The “rule of 65” hypothesis states that “every church, in which a quality index of 65 or more was reached for each of the eight quality characteristics, is a growing church” (*Natural Church Development* 39-40). The bottom line for Schwarz is seen at this point. If a church really wants to grow in worship attendance, he suggests it should strive to achieve a score of 65 or more in all eight areas. This prescription may sound like a tall order, but growing a church requires a commitment to improving all eight areas.

In Figure 2.1 the effects of the minimum factor upon worship attendance are illustrated. The shortest stave determines how much water the barrel can hold. The spiritual significance of the minimum factor can be realized if one considers that the water being added to the barrel is representative of God’s blessing being poured out in

the church. No one wants to stop the blessing, but the church cannot contain more of that blessing unless the area of weakness is addressed. Improving the barrel does not guarantee growth. God is still in control of sending more water (i.e., new people). Christian leaders can be encouraged from Scripture because the New Testament provides much evidence that Jesus wants to fill fishing nets with fish. He does not intend for them to remain empty once the church has done its mending of weak spots.



Source: Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 53

**Figure 2.1. Barrel Illustration.**

### **Survey of Eight Church Health Characteristics in NCD**

The following review is an in-depth look at each of the quality characteristics emphasized by Schwarz in NCD along with added biblical perspectives and models for implementation.

**Empowering leadership** is the principle seen in growing churches in which the pastor concentrates on developing all Christians for ministry. “These pastors equip, support, motivate, and mentor individuals, enabling them to become all that God wants

them to be” (*Natural Church Development* 22). Schwarz contrasts this commitment to multiplication of leaders with what is often highlighted as necessary for growing a church. He characterizes church growth literature as typically featuring leadership styles in which the pastor is more *project driven* than *people oriented*, more *goal driven* than *relationship oriented*, and more *authoritarian* than *team oriented*. His own research admits to finding some surprising results in this area. He observes that a healthy church goes beyond typical either/or thinking. The research shows that both goal setting and relationships are important for healthy leaders and growing churches.

From the fifteen variables related to leadership, the research shows that the factor with the strongest correspondence to the overall quality and growth of a church is simply the willingness of the pastor to seek help from an outside source (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 23). Those leaders who invest time into others for the purposes of discipleship, delegation, and multiplication of themselves find that the more responsibility they give away the more God begins to bless the ministry of the church. Cordeiro writes that the impact a church will have upon a community is related to the percentage of members that have transitioned from church attenders to participants in ministry. He asserts that pastors need to move people from consumers to contributors. He has designed his ministry to function in teams that he calls “fractals.” The use of fractal teams allows for growth without burnout, natural discipleship groupings, and a simple design that can be repeated. Ministry leaders essentially oversee four people and mentor them while working together (176-88).

Schwarz found from the research results that the tendency of church growth literature to feature highly gifted pastors of megachurches often sets up unrealistic

models for the local church to emulate. The conclusion he presents is good news indeed: One does not have to be a superstar pastor to grow a church (*Natural Church Development* 23). Schwarz's conclusion is affirmed by a quote Dale Galloway shared many times in his lectures. "A great leader is not someone who does the work of ten people, but someone who finds ten leaders to do the work" (Hooser).

The biblical foundation for this principle is found in the words of the Apostle Paul: "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). These leadership roles are named and charged with the responsibility of equipping other leaders for their works of service, all for the common purpose of building up the whole church. Implementation of this renewal principle is alluded to through the commitment of the pastor/leader to delegation, mentoring, discipleship, and multiplication of team-based ministry. All of these components play an important part in successful leadership development among the laity of the church. One strategy towards this goal of empowering the leadership of the church is developed further in the following discussion of spiritual gifts. Spiritual gift inventories or discovery processes are available from many sources.

**Gift-oriented ministry** is the principle that provides the practical way of living out the Reformation call for the priesthood of all believers. Believers cannot take their place in ministry aside from the discovery and use of spiritual gifts. Schwarz found this principle provides a very important truth for renewal in the church. When leaders are helped in the discovery of their spiritual gifts and then connected to ministry areas that use those gifts, the "divine growth automatisms" will be seen more dramatically than in

other principles. The research findings had much affirmation for the practical tools that church growth specialists have developed in this area. In fact, “no factor influences the contentedness of Christians more than whether they are utilizing their gifts or not” (*Natural Church Development* 24). The process of moving people away from the old call to duty and service out of obligation cannot be underestimated in its positive effect upon spiritual maturity. Christians were found to have above-average happiness when functioning in their areas of giftedness. They also tended to rely more on the power of the Holy Spirit and less on their own strength. The research showed that high quality, growing churches helped in the growth process by following the discovery process with further training in specific areas of ministry.

The biblical foundation for this principle can be found in 1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-7:

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.... There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

The basis for naming specific gifts can be found in three main passages: 1 Corinthians 12:8-12, Ephesians 4:7-13, and Romans 12:4-8. Other Scriptures are added at times, broadening this inventory to include Old Testament manifestations of the Spirit’s grace.

For implementation strategy, a number of spiritual gift inventories have proven effective in helping a church grow this dimension of discipleship. Willow Creek offers “Network,” which identifies not only spiritual gifts but how passion, personality, and life experience come together to give direction to how gifts may be used in ministry (*Network*). Saddleback’s system is called “S.H.A.P.E.,” an acronym for Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experiences (“Welcome”). Schwarz affirms what many

growing churches already know: gift-based ministry is the only way to see the hope of the Reformation, the priesthood of all believers, come to fruition (*Natural Church Development* 24).

**Passionate spirituality** is the principle that separates growing and declining churches on the basis of the questions: “Are the Christians in this church ‘on fire’? Do they live committed lives and practice their faith with joy and enthusiasm?” (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 26). This principle has less to do with the style of worship (such as charismatic or noncharismatic, liturgical or contemporary) practiced in a church and more to do with the overall spiritual culture. The key concept seemed to be captured by the words *enthusiasm* and *passion* as opposed to the typical walk of faith in which participants are simply fulfilling their duty. In the variables measured, enthusiasm for the faith and enthusiasm for one’s congregation seemed to go hand in hand for high quality, growing churches. The prayer life of Christians was also surveyed in high quality, growing churches and the research found the quantity of time in prayer was not the key, but whether one was inspired in the practice of prayer.

The NCD research results showed that spiritual passion usually scored lower in churches that tend to be legalistic, where being a Christian is tied to orthodoxy, baptism, or right belief before membership is granted. Here is the bottom line for Schwarz: “The quality characteristic ‘passionate spirituality’ demonstrates empirically the theological core of the matter in church growth: the life of faith as a genuine *relationship* [original emphasis] with Jesus Christ” (*Natural Church Development* 27).

The biblical foundation for this principle is stated by Jesus in the **Great Commandment**, in answer to a question that had been posed by a lawyer:



“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matt. 22:36-40)

The Bible challenges believers to grow a wholehearted devotion to God and hearts warmed toward the needs of others. This principle builds upon the first two principles listed. Passion builds as believers are given responsibility to lead and grow. Passion also increases as Christians begin to do more of what they love. One excellent implementation strategy I have found is the Walk to Emmaus. This three-day spiritual retreat is designed to develop leaders for the local church. For many this weekend deepens their experience of God’s love and grows their understanding of his grace. I have seen many participants return from a weekend with a new spiritual hunger and a fervor to put faith into action.

**Functional structures** is the fourth quality characteristic of Natural Church Development and, according to Schwarz, the most controversial. His research “confirmed for the first time an extremely negative relationship between traditionalism and both growth and quality within the church” (*Natural Church Development* 28). In this principle he refers to the decision-making ruts and high degree of control by which a church board that can limit and stifle renewal within a congregation. Instead, healthy churches have a reasonably streamlined structure, which allows ministry areas to develop and encourages ministry leaders to multiply themselves in training other leaders. Schwarz found that the expectation in growing, high quality churches is that leaders will go beyond simply doing ministry to multiplying themselves in the practice of ministry. This task should apply to paid staff as well as volunteers. In healthy churches the decision-making process is generous in permission giving and open enough for this streamlining to

happen as God brings growth. Barna captures the essence of what needs to happen in order for a church to enjoy a healthy setting for ministry:

Although successful churches did not utilize a common structure, they did subscribe to a common philosophy: the ministry is not called to fit the church's structure; the structure exists to further effective ministry. These churches had a keen sense of direction and purpose. Their top priority was to achieve their ministry goals. If the organizational charts and structural procedures inhibited such ministry, they would cautiously but willingly work around the barriers. They were not about to let a man-made system hinder their ability to take advantage of a God-given opportunity to change lives for the Kingdom. The structures they used had been developed, accepted, implemented, reevaluated and upgraded. At all times, the focus was upon ministry, not structure. (*User Friendly Churches* 137-38)

This example is a very positive illustration of what needs to happen for churches in transition. Priorities help to discern what stays and what is laid aside in the change process. Structure is required to serve the mission of the church instead of being reversed.

Warren puts into words a negative dynamic that I have observed in several churches. Over time, churches typically add more activities and more programs to the church calendar without ever removing anything. In this way they often wear out the faithful. The result is that even if a church can name their ministry of critical importance, they are unable to concentrate effort and resources in that direction because of member loyalty to too many other programs of the past. Warren notes while many churches “generate a lot of activity, there is little productivity” (*Purpose Driven Church* 90).

The structure of a church must be flexible enough to support its mission even through rapidly changing circumstances. The structure needs to be geared toward the context of the work of ministry to be done. Healthy churches continually evaluate and change their structures to find the most effective way to accomplish their mission. This principle is an obvious point of applying the call of Jesus (Luke 5:37-38) for new wine

skins to hold the “new wine” of renewal. Building upon this metaphor, Robert I. Logan and Thomas T. Clegg draw a parallel between moving a church towards functional structures and the activities of a vinedresser:

- Removing unproductive branches,
- Pruning the structure that has the greatest potential,
- Shaping through continuous evaluation of fruitbearing,
- Cultivating through training and coaching for increased fruitfulness, and
- Reproducing via apprenticing and permission giving (5-10).

The comments of these two authors summarize a sound biblical foundation for this principle as well as giving an initial strategy for implementation.

**Inspiring worship** is the fifth necessary component of a healthy church.

According to Schwarz this principle has less to do with whether the worship form is liturgical or free, traditional or contemporary. The deciding factor revealed in his research was that most attendees of growing, high quality churches found worship to be inspiring. He attaches great significance to these findings and uses them to question what he labels a popular church growth assumption, namely that “seeker services” are the most effective way to reach unbelievers (*Natural Church Development* 30). The greatest factor working against declining churches, he says, is the presence of those who do not feel inspired and are there simply to fulfill some sense of Christian duty. Their whole demeanor is forced, unpleasant, and lacking in joy. On the other hand, Schwarz believes when “worship is inspiring, it draws people to the services ‘all by itself’” (31). Schwarz seems to be saying that the work of the Holy Spirit can make a given worship style so inspired that it will draw anyone to it. While he clearly makes this thought his universal principle, the

following authors contend that the Spirit works best when the worship style and gospel proclamation is able to match the “heart language” or “heart song” of the hearers (Wagner, *Church Growth* 123). Bill Hybels and Sally Morgenthaler make a good case for offering a variety of worship styles on a given church’s menu. They believe that no one style of worship can reach all people within a geographic area.

On the congregational level, inspiring worship has the quality of celebration and also engagement for Christians as well as those inquiring about the faith. Willow Creek Community Church believes that engagement happens as people hear music that is contemporary and a message that is presented in a way perceived to be relevant to their lives. Hybels has pushed traditional churches to consider using drama as a way to help people hear the gospel. “A person’s resistance to persuasion is very high when spoken to, but very low when exposed to drama and music” (qtd. in Hunter, *How to Reach Secular People* 153). Hybels builds upon this assumption when planning contemporary music, drama, and the preached gospel each weekend at their seeker services with the order of those components reflecting their strategy in getting past the defenses of secular people. Morgenthaler adds to the goal of engaging the hearer as she names four essentials that provide ways to challenge both the growing Christian and the tentative seeker:

- Worship essential #1: Nearness—a sense of God’s presence (97),
- Worship essential #2: Knowledge—worship centered in knowing Christ (102),
- Worship essential #3: Vulnerability—participants opening up to God (109), and
- Worship essential #4: Interaction—participation in a relationship with God and with others (117).

Schwarz's analysis of the findings about the impact of worship on the growth of the church seem slightly shallow when he discounts any difference between various forms and styles. No weight is given to the relevance of form or to participatory style in trying to reach certain segments of the culture. Morgenthaler tackles the issues with which worship planners are wrestling and explores several common myths behind the drive for cultural relevance in the church. The first myth to fall is the belief that churches have to dump all forms of tradition to become relevant for today's seekers. Jackie Coffey and Grace Marestaing remind pastors, "Effective communication takes us from the familiar and moves us lovingly to the unfamiliar" (2). Morgenthaler cites statistics that show 83 percent of adults were churchgoers at some time in their lives. "What that means is that most people in this country born before 1963 have had some experience with traditional forms of worship" (128). Not all of that experience was negative, so for those who return to the church, a desire to connect with something familiar is often present. She cites another study suggesting that two-thirds of the unchurched, if they did return to church, would like it to be an "informal" church experience. They did not give much detail about what that might look like, but 47 percent did specify a desire to have *some* traditional music or hymns, though not necessarily sung in the "traditional way" (129).

The second myth to go down was the thought that old style is out. Some church traditions are not as offensive as some people think. American marketing analysts have pegged this trend towards anything nostalgic. "People are reacting to change; frightened by losing control, and worried about the future.... Nostalgia is in! Many Americans are trying to recapture yesterday" (L. Anderson 61). Tradition certainly seems to be making a comeback. These authors suggest this feeling of nostalgia has implications for the church.

Although biblical understanding is lacking for many, the abiding memory within most people includes a yearning for an encounter with certain familiar worship elements. This longing plays out every year, towards the beginning of November, as the Christmas music played in the malls contains renditions of several hundred year old hymns. The marketplace has capitalized on this trend and may be able to give assistance to the church in this area.

Morgenthaler points out that many evangelicals have a very negative perception of some elements of worship tradition, yet she maintains that tradition is one of the primary ways to organize life. Webster defines “Tradition” as “the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs” (987). In this discussion, Morgenthaler makes a very profound statement. “Tradition keeps us from having to lay down new tracks under everything we do” (132). The “tracks” of worship tradition are supposed to lead believers into the presence of God. Churches need to evaluate whether their worship traditions are accomplishing this purpose. She is pushing the church in this area and makes the observation that traditions need to be updated if they will continue to do that for which they were designed—connecting people with God. The kingpin issue for churches in transition centers on this issue. They much choose which traditions to discard and which to keep as they try to create a space where God’s presence is real to worshippers.

The importance of the role of worship is seen in a 1994 poll in which Barna asked regular church attendees how often their services brought them into God’s presence. According to his findings, 27 percent responded “always,” while 12 percent responded “usually.” Barna discovered, however, that 27 percent said “rarely” or “did not know,” and 34 percent said they had never sensed God’s presence in worship (*Barna Report* 59).

These statistics certainly make clear the challenge that is always before pastors and the planners of worship.

The biblical foundation for this principle can be located within the “hymn book” contained in the Scriptures themselves. The writers penned these words long ago, yet they still capture the heart of the issue. The Psalms of old call believers to carry out precisely what many authors and worship leaders are suggesting:

Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing. Know that the Lord Himself is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the Lord is good; His loving kindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations. (Ps. 100:1-5)

Worship can include shouting, glad hearts, joyful singing, and service as well; all for the express purpose of fully engaging the believer. Additional Psalms call worshippers to new songs (Ps. 149:1) and new forms—dancing (Ps. 149:3). God even seems to be pleased with loud expressions (Ps. 150:5). The ideas and strategies for implementing the principle of inspiring worship have been previously detailed.

**Holistic small groups** are the disciple-making communities within the congregation fulfilling several levels of purpose. God can use small groups to provide evangelism and discipleship opportunities in all of the following ways:

- multiple entry ways into the church for visitors and newcomers,
- an open door for the unchurched to begin a journey of faith,
- a reliable form of pastoral care or prayer for individual needs,
- a place for believers to find nurture and connection,
- a place for believers to learn to share their faith with others,

- a way to organize for service and outreach into the community,
- accelerated spiritual growth as participants identify and use spiritual gifts, and
- a system for raising up and training future leaders (Galloway, Lectures).

Given all the benefits to be seen from the development of small groups, one can see why Natural Church Development is using the multiplication of small groups as a universal church growth principle. For Schwarz, the quality and impact of small groups within the life of a church depend greatly upon what they do. By “holistic” he means they must go beyond biblical discussion to practical application of Scripture in daily life. In this way they will add a dimension of spiritual health to a congregation that cannot be achieved in any other way. They also need to be open to group members discussing issues and questions of immediate concern. Holistic small groups are designed to grow and multiply like healthy cells in a physical body. In fact, Schwarz sees the multiplication of small groups as the single most important principle discovered in his research. Even acknowledging the necessity of harmonious interplay among all eight quality characteristics, this one is key to health and growth (*Natural Church Development* 33).

In growing churches small groups are much more than a supplemental program. The fundamental nature of faith is often worked out among the group members. The larger the church, the more crucial the small group principle will be to future growth (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*; Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*; Galloway, *Small Group Book*; George).

Carl F. George’s meta-church model is based upon two components: large group *celebration* and the smaller *cell group* or small group, which he considers the primary building block of the church. His meta-church model calls for a new set of organizational



priorities that are people centered, ministry centered, and care centered (78). George's cell groups concentrate on "four dimensions of ministry: loving (pastoral care), learning (Bible knowledge), deciding (internal administration), and doing (duties that serve those outside the group)" (89). Galloway's Tender Loving Care (TLC) groups have four basic purposes that he lists as evangelism, shepherding, discipleship, and service (*Small Group Book* 61). All of his groups are organized under two possible categories—nurture groups oriented towards discipleship or task groups that carry out particular tasks or ministries.

Small groups or cell groups function most successfully with eight to twelve people meeting informally in homes. Small groups have been found to provide the most effective setting for communicating the gospel in today's high-tech society. In fact, Snyder maintains that these groups are better suited in carrying out the mission of the church in an urban world than are "traditional church services, institutional church programs or the mass communication media. Methodologically speaking, the small group offers the best hope for the discovery and use of spiritual gifts and for renewal in church and society" (*Radical Renewal* 149).

Jesus modeled the biblical foundation for this principle in his life and ministry. He called twelve disciples to be a small group with whom he worked closely. He trained them and invested three years of teaching with them. He had other disciples (referenced by his sending the seventy-two out into ministry [Luke 10:1]), female followers (Mary Magdalene), and intimate friends (Lazarus, Mary, and Martha), but the weight of Jesus' influence was given to the small group, not individuals nor the crowds.

**Need-orientated evangelism** is the key to effective communication of the gospel in a local congregation according to Schwarz. At its basic level, evangelism is the

responsibility of every Christian, yet Schwarz acknowledges the truth in Wagner's thesis that only about ten percent of all Christians actually have the spiritual gift of evangelism (*Natural Church Development* 34). Need-oriented evangelism majors on meeting people at their point of perceived need. The goal is to develop relationships around a shared need that then creates a bridge of faith into their world instead of expecting nonbelievers to take an interest in the world of the church.

Many opportunities for this type of evangelism present themselves in the ever-increasing brokenness of society and the world. Many churches are targeting people's sense of need by offering divorce recovery groups, grief care groups, parenting classes, after-school tutoring for kids of parents still at work, young mothers' activities, and marriage enrichment events. While it is common for a church to host local AA meetings or other twelve-step recovery programs, some churches are going beyond hospitality to starting recovery groups that connect people to the healing power of Jesus Christ. God is doing an incredible work through programs such as Celebrate Recovery, which began at Saddleback Church in California. The program offers freedom to all who struggle with the hurts, habits, and hang-ups that mess up their lives ("Why Is Celebrate Recovery Important?"). Every Friday evening, hundreds of people come with their brokenness, addictions, and hidden shame, to find acceptance, honesty, healing, and community in the body of Christ (Warren, *Purpose Driven Church* 222).

These examples still require people to come to the church or go to church-sponsored classes. The Vineyard Church has found a way to take the gospel out of the church context and create moments in which God's grace is experienced. This church in Cincinnati challenges their people to participate in monthly "servant evangelism"

outreaches. By this method, they are “demonstrating the kindness of God by offering to do some act of humble service with no strings attached” (Sjogren 17-18). These acts of service can include free car washes, free Cokes at ball games, cleaning toilets for business owners on Main Street, and depositing coins in expired parking meters with a friendly note left on the windshield. The church bases these acts of service on the principle that serving those outside the church is a normal activity for Christians. Free service offers a picture of God’s grace, as a priceless gift that can never be repaid. A card is often attached: “We hope this humble gesture of kindness brings some light into your day. It’s our way of saying God Loves You!” (44). On the back of the card is the church name with directions and worship times. Acts of kindness often get the person’s attention and start them asking questions. The benefit of this type of outreach is twofold. First, believers are not making a forced gospel presentation. Many people are curious and ask why these things are being done. Second, the servants simply answer questions. Kindness shows people God’s love in a practical way. The responses are tailored to match the individual’s level of receptivity. Actions alone are not enough. Kind deeds without words leave people with the idea that nice people are nearby but no knowledge of how close God’s love is to their lives. Kindness plants a seed, and then God’s Spirit can work in unseen ways. Pastor Steve Sjogren observes that Christians and non-Christians have one thing in common: They both hate evangelism. This outreach work can be summarized in this way: Deeds of love + words of love + adequate time = servant evangelism (22).

George G. Hunter III, asserts that nothing renews a church’s health as much as a steady stream of new disciples. Effective evangelism will meet real needs and result in visible fruit. A few new Christians will raise the level of enthusiasm in the whole

congregation. For years he has been asking the question, “How do you communicate the Christian faith to the growing numbers of ‘secular people’ in the western world?” (*How to Reach Secular People* 13). His answer is the “apostolic” church. Effective apostolic congregations know the following truths:

1. People who aren’t disciples are lost;
2. Lost people matter to God;
3. Church is primarily a mission to lost people, not primarily a gathered colony of the faithful;
4. The importance of high expectations for their people;
5. What to change and what to preserve;
6. The importance of understanding, loving, and liking secular people;
7. The importance of accepting unchurched people;
8. The importance of using music that secular people understand;
9. The importance of starting new congregations; and,
10. The importance of involvement in world mission. (144-54)

Hunter then goes on to list what effective congregations do with these truths:

1. Research the community and unchurched population.
2. “Profile” their target population.
3. Define a clear mission and plan for the future.
4. Develop and implement a strategy for reaching unchurched people.
5. Deploy their laity in ministry.
6. Train their people for Christian witness.
7. Offer “seeker sensitive” Sunday worship.
8. Challenge people to commit their lives to Christ.
9. Open their hearts to the presence and power of God.
10. Want other churches to join in reaching out to secular people. (154-69)

Hunter clearly believes that effective evangelism involves more than a simple outreach strategy. A church must have something appropriate to which to invite the new person when he or she accepts the invitation to attend. Hunter acknowledges the importance of accepting attitudes and calls all to a renewed sense of mission as a church. Then he links evangelism and worship and specifically challenges the church to plan the form of worship to carry the musical style of those it is intended to attract.

The Bible gives two starting points for building a biblical foundation for this principle. Jesus was pretty clear in the verses known as the **Great Commission** that he wanted believers to share the gospel with others:

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18-20)

A second strategy is detailed above in which words became secondary to the expression of kindness. Sjogren bases his church’s servant evangelism on the text in Romans 2:4, in which kindness is seen as one way God brings a person to repentance. Intentional expressions of caring and kindness are joined with a word of Christian witness. Many have found the hard of heart to be much more receptive to God’s grace when it is presented in this context.

**Loving relationships** is the eighth quality characteristic that NCD research demonstrates as a universal growth principle. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you.... By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). Jesus expects the commitment towards others to be perceptible in how Christians demonstrate love and authentic caring. The NCD survey only measured relationships inside the church, but healthy churches show love for outsiders, too. Schwarz saw growing churches all had a higher than average “love quotient” than did stagnant or declining congregations. To tally this “love quotient” the questionnaire asked a series of related questions.

Respondents were asked (among others things) how much time members spend with one another outside of official church-sponsored events. For example, how often do they invite one another over for meals or a cup of coffee? How generous is the church in doling out compliments? To what

extent is the pastor aware of the personal problems of the lay workers in the congregation? How much laughter is there in the church? (*Natural Church Development* 36)

He notes several times how these critical principles are strangely missing from most church growth programs, but I see most prominent leaders who promote small groups (Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*; Galloway, *Small Group Book*, George; Snyder, *Radical Renewal*) all pointing to the caring relationships that can be best formed in groups. In fact, they say the best way to find authentic community is to gather with eight to twelve others in the context of honest spiritual conversation. In the end, mature Christian love is found at the intersection of a growing relationship with Jesus, close relationships with other people, and an appropriate love of self.

The doctrine of the Trinity also informs a believer's understanding of the importance of loving relationships. As Cowart says, "The Trinity, particularly as understood in the writings of such Trinitarian theologians as Colin Gunton and John Zizioulas, reveals that the very nature of God is defined by the relationship that exists among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (7). Stanley Grenz raises further implications as he insists being created in the image of God involves a horizontal element:

Because God is "community"—the fellowship shared among the Father, Son, and Spirit—the creation of humankind in the divine image must be related to humans in fellowship with each other. God's own character can only be mirrored by humans who *love after the manner of the perfect love which lies at the heart of the triune God* [emphasis mine]. (79)

The truth of this principle is seen in the fact that people are social creatures. Humans have been created for relationship, that basic human hunger for caring and intimacy that draws people together. The church is intended to be a place where needs for love and fellowship can be met in healthy ways. A healthy church is a church that has intentionally

planned for the meeting of this core need. Small groups and fellowship events are the steps towards nurturing loving relationships.

### **Critique of NCD**

Much time and emphasis has been given to NCD in the literature review because it is the tool chosen as the centerpiece for this study. At the same time, NCD has inherent weaknesses that need to be acknowledged. Church health, when applied by itself, can become inward oriented. The focus of the survey instrument only measures the climate inside the church, according to the current members. With that inward perspective, people tend to lose sight of Christ's mandate for reaching lost souls.

During the decade since Schwarz first published his findings, objections have been raised about the credibility of his research. Hunter et al. give voice to several problems with the strategy and assumptions of Schwarz. They assess that NCD downplays the role of the pastoral leader and visionary leadership, diminishes the impact of having a clear mission and the necessity for an outreach strategy, and allows for a church to be called healthy regardless of its greater social ethic. They see no recognition for the importance of context and developing an understanding about the culture of a local church's target population. While Schwarz has tried to move away from the complicated formulas of the church growth era, Hunter et al. see NCD as nothing more than a recipe for church renewal, in simplified form (105-12).

Hunter et al. further allege that church health simply repeats the three big mistakes of the past. First, church health literature in general and NCD in particular list evangelism as simply one of eight priorities for the local congregation. Second, church health proponents perpetuate the idea that if a church can renew itself or get healthy

enough on the inside it will then be able to reach out effectively to the community.

Hunter et al.'s observation is that many churches with a church health strategy never get around to doing mission and outreach because the internal climate of a church never becomes healthy enough to make that shift to the external. Third, Hunter et al. boldly assert that nothing renews a local congregation more than the steady influx of new believers (113).

The research methods of NCD are called into question from two fronts. Hunter et al. cite Lyle Schaller as saying the methodology of Schwarz was flawed "because its conclusions depend entirely upon the subjective self-reporting of church members" (106). The only thorough analysis of NCD to have been published before Hunter et al. was an article by John Elias and Flavil Yeakley. These authors also objected to the assumption that self-reported self-perceptions could be called facts (90). Their overall contention with Schwarz is that "his book is fatally flawed by the pseudo-scientific way the material is presented" (83). Hunter et al. raise a huge objection about the methodology, which fails to prioritize input from new converts. They would rather see those newly redeemed asked about their perceptions of the church before they are blind to the local deficiencies. They state that the higher form of research would be direct interviews with a trained consultant with individuals in this category to assure understanding of the questions (109).

I think Hunter et al. have a legitimate question in regards to placing evangelism into the basket with seven other priorities. Equal energy applied to all eight areas does not always yield equal results for each quality characteristic. Hybels made this point at a Church Leaders Conference. He indicated that his experience in ministry revealed that a much greater portion of leadership time, energy, and resources must be applied to the



priority of evangelism or it will never happen. Church leaders have such a high degree of inertia in the area of evangelism they must commit at least 40 percent of their energy to outreach before the church will experience a balanced return alongside other priorities.

Acknowledging the weaknesses with NCD, I chose to go ahead with this tool as my main intervention for several reasons. The NCD questionnaire was one survey among several available that looked helpful. As a new pastor, I needed to get a good read on the current strengths and weaknesses in my church. The survey could provide an initial assessment on where the congregation needs to grow. I think internal health does prepare a congregation for missional outreach and caring ministries for the hurting and lost. Healthy churches will begin to reflect the heart of God. NCD gave me a model from which to begin to teach what a healthy church is like. My literature review began with a strong theology of renewal aimed at love of God and love of neighbor. The social ethic of the church is anchored in a theology of the Trinity. The heart of God, as seen in the actions of Jesus, compels believers to take action on behalf of those often outside the fellowship of the church, namely, the least, the last, and the lost.

Hunter et al. predict that receiving ten new converts would make a positive impact on the health of any church. The new life and the vitality of a number of new believers could take a congregation's eyes off themselves. The reality in my ministry has been more of a mixed blessing. Ten new faces usually represent high levels of brokenness and people needing a high level of caring. Most new Christians do not arrive full of the Holy Spirit, spiritual zeal, and a hunger to grow. I feel embarrassed sometimes in my current setting when a new person comes into the church. I wonder what will happen if no one notices them or reaches out to them. I think a degree of preparation is required to move

current members to try to understand the new person's pain and be able to minister effectively. The goal is to create a warm, welcoming, and nurturing climate into which new seekers and believers can come. Wesley believed supportive community was so important that he actually "refused to preach in any place where he could not follow it up by organized Societies with adequate leadership. He was out to make disciples—disciples who would renew the whole church" (Snyder, *Radical Wesley* 64).

My goal is to see certain minimum levels of health established before pushing the church towards outreach into the community. Once the church is on track towards improved levels of congregational health, new initiatives towards community outreach and missional focus can and will be added. Developing a healthy context to which new believers can be added is imperative in the local setting.

### **Beginning a Successful Turnaround**

Darrell Whiteman suggests good beginnings start with the attitude of a learner. When a new pastor is trying to begin a successful turnaround, this season of ministry requires the leader to spend a significant amount of time as listener, asking lots of questions and maintaining an attitude of humility.

One of the first questions to ask involves some form of assessment. Someone needs to find out with all honesty how the church is doing. Natural Church Development provides a workable tool for starting this process. The NCD survey helps break through congregational denial concerning weaknesses that may need improvement. The survey separates symptoms from underlying problems. This assessment stage helps a congregation identify their "minimum factor" and begin to strategize towards a unified response (Caprell 4; Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 108; Reed 25).

The next important step is to begin to build spiritual energy or momentum.

Almost every turnaround strategy consulted recommended asking for prayer support to cultivate a renewed spiritual awareness within the congregation. From prayer walking to hands-on mission work, believers need to be intentionally engaged so that no single individual (pastor or leader) carries the whole weight of the challenges to come. A fresh sense of momentum overcomes the inertia of “the way things are” (Caprell 3-4; Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 106; Barna, *Turn-Around Churches* 85; Reed 26).

The third step involves team building and timing. Many speakers acknowledge the value of teams in ministry (Cordeiro; Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders around*; Hybels; Galloway, *Small Group Book*), but initiating change requires the pastor to have support from other leaders and influencers within the church in order to survive. Timing is also an issue. Knowing when to act and when to wait is an art. Pastors need to have the patience for deposits to accumulate in their “trust bank” so that when they make a withdrawal, they still have a positive balance. The positive emotional connections a pastor makes within the congregation count as deposits. The balance is also enhanced with a generous commitment on the part of the pastor to relate to all members, no matter which side of a change issue they may represent (Larry Johnson 28). The pastor makes withdrawals by initiating change and beginning to challenge the way things have been allowed to drift. Sometimes this step involves redeveloping the leadership team because the people that got the church into the current state of decline will not be able to lead the church out with the same attitudes (Caprell 4; Reed 26).

The fourth step involves implementation of a turnaround initiative. After the “minimum factor” has been identified, a strategy related to that weakness needs to be put

in motion. NCD encourages goals to be qualitative. “Qualitative goals are precise, time-bound, verifiable, measurable goals which relate to the *increase of quality in a church* [original emphasis]” (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 110). These goals are specifically connected with a quality characteristic that leadership can influence. Leaders are unable to control whether worship attendance will increase by 10 percent or not, but they can work to improve quality of worship (Caprell 4; Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 110-11; Reed 27-28).

The fifth step recommended by NCD helps keep a positive focus in the midst of change. Churches are encouraged to exercise their strengths. The NCD motto is, “Find your strengths, develop them, enjoy them, use them. What for? In order to make progress in the area of your minimum factor” (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 116). The choice to focus on the positive can be a very affirming stage as leadership encourages members to do things for which they know they have been gifted.

### **Dealing with Resistance to Change**

Resistance to change is a universal issue for everyone, including those in church leadership. People resist change even when it is in their best interest. John Maxwell lists over a dozen issues as to why this resistance is so strong:

- The change is not self-initiated. Those involved lack ownership.
- Change threatens people’s habit patterns and disrupts routines.
- People resist change when the purpose of change is unclear.
- Change is resisted because of a fear of failure.
- The effort required to change is evaluated in light of personal gain/loss.
- People are too satisfied with the way things are.

- Negative thinking can block the opportunities of change.
- The followers lack respect for the leader.
- Change requires additional commitment and time.
- Narrow-mindedness thwarts acceptance of new ideas.
- Tradition resists change (*Developing the Leader within* 56-62).

Understanding the climate for change is critical when initiating change in a church.

Assessing the readiness for change is crucial in any organization. Discerning leaders know when the time is right. “People change when they *hurt* enough they *have* to change; *learn* enough they *want* to change; *receive* enough they are *able* to change” (63). Wise leaders make sure they have the trust of their people before making dramatic changes (66). Maxwell measures the trust level by the numbers of “coins” the pastor has in his or her pocket. Every new pastor starts out with several coins based on the grace of a fresh start, and if the relationship grows, additional coins are earned for the future (68). When these coins are spent wisely, capable leaders can build momentum for next steps. Trust is a huge factor when planning for change.

### **The Change Process**

In his book, John P. Kotter lays out an eight-step process for bringing about successful change in businesses and organizations. These principles for understanding people and organizations provide a serious foundation upon which the strategies for change in the church can be based.

**Step one: Establishing a sense of urgency.** In order to initiate effective change, the challenge for leaders must create a sense of urgency (Kotter 35). They must communicate to the people involved that the proposed changes are not optional. In fact,

the absence of desperation can hamper the group's very survival. "By far the biggest mistake people make when trying to change organizations is to plunge ahead without establishing a high enough sense of urgency in fellow managers and employees" (4).

**Step two: Creating the guiding coalition.** Kotter makes the point that major change is very difficult to accomplish and sustain. No one individual, no matter how strong, can keep all the energy in a group or business focused in the way that is needed to sustain lasting improvement. "A strong guiding coalition is always needed.... Building such a team is always an essential part of the early stages of any effort to restructure, reengineer, or retool a set of strategies" (52).

**Step three: Developing a vision and strategy.** Kotter found that many strategies for change fail at precisely this third point. Too many leaders underestimate the importance of a clear and compelling vision. People need to know why change is needed. They need to understand the reasons behind the adjustment requested and the ultimate goal for making the change (69).

**Step four: Communicating the vision of change.** The need here is to put the word out often enough that a shared sense of a desirable future begins to take shape in the minds of all members of the organization. Communication is necessary to motivate and coordinate action that will bring about transformation. Kotter portrays effective communication as simple, repetitious, and encountered in multiple forums. Vision can be promoted as a verbal word picture, metaphor, or analogy. Communication is effective when it gives explanation to seeming inconsistencies and allows feedback (90).

**Step five: Empowering others for broad-based action.** When the first four steps have been carefully put into forward motion, those employees or staff implementing

the change strategy will be the ones to encounter the day-to-day obstacles. The purpose of this step is to empower a broader base of people to take action toward the proposed goals. These frontline leaders need the freedom and authority to remove the obstacles that will come (Kotter 102).

**Step six: Generating short-term wins.** Time is needed to process the changes throughout the organization. Unless people see some positive results from a series of changes, they may become discouraged and give up; therefore, wise leaders try to create some short-term wins. Kotter makes an observation in the opening section of his book:

Creating short-term wins is different from hoping for short-term wins. The latter is passive, the former active. In a successful transformation, managers actively look for ways to obtain clear performance improvements, establish goals in the yearly planning system, achieve these objectives, and reward the people involved. (11)

Real transformation takes time to work down into the fabric of the organization. If those experiencing the personal sacrifice and emotional cost of change do not see some early fruit, the whole process can lose momentum and stall within the first two years (119).

**Step seven: Consolidating gains to produce more change.** Short-term successes are essential to keep momentum going, but if the urgency of change is lost, the forces of resistance can quickly sweep away all that has been gained. Kotter states that at this stage “the guiding coalition uses the credibility afforded by short-term wins to tackle additional and bigger change projects” (143). The need to maintain momentum means more change, not less.

**Step eight: Anchoring innovation into the culture.** Kotter observes that the last stage of change is the most critical. The whole process can fail if the manager declares victory too soon. The effective change agent will make sure the vision is cast and recast,

that wins are celebrated, and that values are constantly reinforced until the new way of doing things is securely embedded within the very culture of the organization:

*Culture* refers to norms of behavior and shared values among a group of people. *Norms of behavior* are common or pervasive ways of acting that are found in a group and that persist because group members tend to behave in ways that teach these practices to new members, rewarding those who fit in and sanctioning those who do not. *Shared values* are important concerns and goals shared by most of the people in a group that tend to shape group behavior. (148)

The culture of an organization is not something that a leader can manipulate easily.

Culture changes only after people's actions have been changed, after the new strategy produces some group benefit for a period of time, and after participants see the connection between the changes and product improvement. The change in culture is the final step in the process of renewing the vitality of an organization or business (157).

The ability to adapt or change is essential for any church to become and continue as the healthy functioning body God designed it to be. Kotter's principles have value and obvious application in the church. Allen Nelson and Gene Appel translate these stages of change into the language and context of the church. They offer these insights on how change is different in the church than in the context of a for-profit corporation.

Change can be harder in the church for the following reasons. First, churches tend to function as tradition keepers. While they do perpetuate values of the historic church, "we tend to confuse ageless truths with cultural traditions. The latter change while the former should remain in their purest form" (Nelson and Appel 44). Second, culture plays a huge factor in the way churches function. Because culture tends to be perpetuated by long-standing patterns and involve emotional commitments, churches process change more slowly. In order to avoid hurt feelings and damaging relationships, church leaders



opt for avoiding issues that can create conflict, such as ideas for improvement. Third, the church is not as in touch with its bottom line. Effectiveness is more difficult to measure. Fourth, change-weary people view the church as the one place where things can stay the same. Fifth, churches tend to lack leaders who understand the change process. Conflict is handled poorly, if at all. Most pastors are wired for stimulating incremental changes that rarely brings deep transformation needed by many churches (44-45).

Nelson and Appel also believe that the church can change more efficiently than large corporations for significant reasons. First, churches have the help of the Holy Spirit and can allow for the possibility for supernatural activity in their midst. Most corporations are led by human logic. The leaders of the church potentially respond to insights of a divine source. Second, churches tend to have lower overhead. Their primary asset is people, so economically speaking they have more flexibility in implementing change. Third, the church has the advantage of a history and higher calling, which prepare believers for change. Faith communities throughout history have gone through revival, persecution, and waves of expansion. Congregations must constantly live by faith more than civic organizations. As a result, they can be more responsive to change. Fourth, churches have a calling higher than guarding the bottom line. They are vendors of hope and channels of God's grace for the whole world and, as such, can challenge constituents to greater sacrifice to make improvements than other organizations (46-48).

Every church has people that view new ideas and innovations differently. People grow and change as individuals all throughout life; therefore, everyone has to respond to change at some point, but people tend to assimilate new ideas at their own speed. The five personality types of Everett Rogers have been adapted for use in the church.

Understanding the various ways God has wired people as individuals helps leaders catch a glimpse of how change can unfold effectively. Nelson and Appel call the 2 to 5 percent of the general population that tend to go after new ideas early on, *creators*. These people are out-of-the-box thinkers, artists, inventors, and prophets. The *progressives* serve to refine the new ideas and make them practical and workable. They are the 10 to 20 percent of society that adopt new ideas easily and put them in motion. *Builders* are good-hearted members who value stability and time-tested methods. They are not so much resistant to change as they are dependent upon progressives to show them which new ideas are necessary. This group makes up 25 to 40 percent of a typical organization or church. *Foundationals* include people who prefer things stay as they are. They are cautious and reluctant for change to occur. They help a group keep from losing touch with meaningful history and past values. This large group consists of 25 to 40 percent of society. The final group of people is called *anchors*. They benefit the church by requiring new ideas to be well thought out before being implemented. They have a great love and appreciation for heritage, routine, and ritual. Ten to 20 percent of the population is wired in this way (Nelson and Appel 75-78). Knowing these categories and the tendencies of the main influencers helps a leader understand how a church will respond to change. “For any significant new idea to become adopted, it must first be accepted by a critical mass of the opinion leaders” (78). Great discernment is needed to measure the tipping point at which enough people are on board with an idea to predict if it will succeed when it is launched.

The most dreaded stage or phase in the change process is the time of transition described by some as the “neutral zone” (Bridges 5). William Bridges is famous for writing, “It isn’t the changes that do you in, it’s the transitions” (3). Change is external.

Transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with a new set of circumstances. Transition is internal. Unless transition occurs, change will not work. The first task in this process is letting go of what has passed away. The second step in the process of transition management is understanding what comes after the letting go—the neutral zone. “This is the psychological no-man’s-land between the old reality and the new one. It is the limbo between the old sense of identity and the new. It is the time when the old way doing things is gone but the new way doesn’t feel comfortable yet” (8). Painful though it often is, the neutral zone is the individual’s and organization’s best chance for creativity, renewal, and redevelopment. This period is a time when innovation is most possible and when revitalization begins. The neutral zone is both a dangerous and an opportune time. Emotionally speaking, people cannot embrace new beginnings or ideas if they have not first acknowledged an ending and spent some time in the neutral zone. Good beginnings depend upon healthy endings.

### **Leadership and Change**

One key in the restructuring process is the development of an influential change agent or champion that has the stamina to survive the difficulties involved in bringing change in the church. “At this point, every significant change will need a champion who will see the change process through to the end. The law of physics says that a body at rest tends to remain at rest” (Nelson and Appel 56). Innovations without a champion are doomed to die from the outset.

The stress carried by this leadership role demands the church put in place a unique metaphor for the style of team needed to maintain momentum over the long haul. Maxwell highlights the leadership style of a flock of geese. Part of their efficiency is in

the “V” formation used. The flock enjoys a 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird were flying on its own. The other part of their advantage is in rotating the position of lead goose. When the lead goose tires, it rotates back to the end of one side of the “V” and another goose moves up the point position (*Developing the Leaders around 8*).

### **Dealing with Differences: Making Conflict Work for You**

“The single biggest fear and pain that church change produces is conflict” (Nelson and Appel 227). Because leaders by nature are change agents, they will create circumstances where people have to engage new ideas, the status quo, and plans for progress. It is seldom productive to seek to placate all sides when there is disagreement. A church cannot keep everyone happy all the time. Leaders with peace as their top priority succumb to a maintenance level of ministry. On the other hand, churches need to be cautious accepting a leader drawn to conflict or working with a person who finds enjoyment in creating division. Good leaders respect the struggle involved in change but do not kindle it for conflict’s sake. A seasoned leader does well to prepare for the inevitability of turbulence and conflict.

Hybels teaches that the real goal is to get people to fight fair, not to avoid the potential for conflict. In fact, he believes “the popular concept of unity is a fantasy land where disagreements never surface and contrary opinions are never stated with force. We expect disagreement, forceful disagreement. So instead of *unity*, we use the word *community*” (Hybels, “Handling Conflict” 1). Willow Creek Community Church teaches that the mark of community—true biblical unity—is not the absence of conflict but the presence of a reconciling spirit. The church that follows this advice may actually experience more conflict, but most of it stays above ground. At least then it can be dealt

with in a healthy and straightforward manner. Conflict that goes underground poisons the soil and causes hurt on all sides in the end. Healthy boundaries can help make conflict productive and ensure that everyone is fighting fair. Naturally, strong leaders with divergent opinions will clash from time to time. Conflict can be healthy and useful for a church if fair-fight guidelines such as the following are put in place.

1. Involved persons will follow the direction of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-20 and speak with others face-to-face instead of pretending an issue does not exist or talking about others behind their backs. The discussion will happen around the meeting room table and not in the church parking lot.

2. When talking through a disagreement, honesty is allowed and encouraged. One issue will be dealt with at a time. If more than one issue is presented, the order of issues to be discussed will be addressed. All dimensions of the problem will be explored as well as alternative solutions to the issue.

3. If discussion escalates, all sides agree not to perpetuate the pain by inflicting new hurts. Tactics such as name-calling, mind reading (assigning evil motives to others), discrediting another person, or using information from confidential sources are disallowed. Even insinuating that such confidential information exists is deemed off limits.

4. All persons involved in the issue will stay at the table until the process has worked itself through. If any party is uncomfortable with the forum in which the conflict is raised, they may offer suggestions as to a more appropriate setting to finish the process.

5. Finally, there is a deep reward at the end of this biblical process. Offended parties experience the joy of giving and receiving reconciliation. The work of

reconciliation is not only necessary for the preserving and deepening of Christian community, it is also pleasing to God (Hybels, “Handling Conflict” 12).

The one ingredient that affects the implementation of these boundaries for fighting fair in the life of a church is the spiritual maturity of those on the leadership team. Much is revealed about personal character when someone is under stress or involved in turmoil. Maxwell offers an observation tool for assessing someone’s style of dealing with problems or conflict. Emotionally and symbolically, everyone has at their disposal two buckets: one contains water and the other gasoline. “The ‘spark’ before you will either become a greater problem because you pour the gasoline on it, or it will be extinguished because you use the bucket of water” (*Developing the Leaders around* 4). If an individual’s first response is to throw the bucket of gasoline onto the fire, Maxwell urges caution. He or she probably needs to be moved away from the center of decision making. That person will in all probability continue to stir the trouble instead of being a part of the solution. On the other hand, if an individual’s first response is to throw the bucket of water onto the fire, the probability is good; he or she is dependable and can be trusted with greater responsibility on the team. This individual has demonstrated steadiness and emotional maturity at a crucial moment and probably can be counted on to do the same in the future. This person is in control of personal emotional responses and has the ability to help manage the responses of others in a conflict.

### **Literature Concerning Research Methodology**

As noted in the previous sections, a successful turnaround begins with someone leading God’s call to renewal for the church. That individual must be capable of dealing with resistance, negotiating the change process, and choosing other leaders who share a

commitment to building a healthy and vital church. All of these leaders must possess the capacity to endure through times of uncertainty and conflict. The plan for this project does not come from my pioneer spirit but from a desire to stand on the shoulders of past research. In this project I hope to add a fresh perspective to the research that has been done before. With this goal in mind, what follows is a brief survey of recent dissertations that chose to use Natural Church Development as their intervention tool.

Adams published a study in 2000 that used NCD to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of her new church. Her goal was to focus the identified strengths in building up the weaknesses and thereby improve the overall health and vitality of the church. This work was grounded in the New Testament theology of the church as a vital, life-giving community. Natural Church Development provided a biblical framework for growing a healthy community of faith. Adams selected thirty members to be participants based on leadership roles, staff positions, and core involvement. An initial survey was taken to establish the baseline measurement for the church two months after she arrived. The leadership team then planned the intervention and implemented a strategy for using strengths, empowering leadership and loving relationships (both scored 44) to improve the weaknesses, passionate spirituality (28), and need-oriented evangelism (29). After seven months the process of testing and planning was repeated with a final evaluation at the end of fourteen months. At the midpoint, Adams found a significant increase in all eight factors, with the result that the two weaknesses had not gained on the other areas. The initial minimum factors were still the focus of attention. The conclusion of her study found the characteristic of need-oriented evangelism still at the bottom, with passionate spirituality ahead by one point, but the overall health score for the church increased by

thirteen points. The observation was made that having two minimum factors might have divided the intended impact of the treatment period, thus explaining the fact that both weaknesses remained at the bottom of the scale after fourteen months of attention.

Documentation was presented showing that increased health did arrest a five-year decline in worship attendance. Average weekly worship attendance went up by 13 percent, from 130 to 147, in the year NCD was applied.

In 2002, Kofahl finished a study designed to research the impact of using NCD to transform a church in a declining area. The region around his church had seen factories closing and people moving away. This decline had impacted the community and church both economically and in the area of leadership. Many of the more visionary people had moved when seeking new jobs. Kofahl had been the pastor of this church for thirteen years when the NCD questionnaire was first used to ascertain baseline health levels for the congregation. Kofahl chose thirty participants for the survey. The lay leadership team met to respond to the research findings. Their maximum factor was empowering leadership (50) and their focus became the minimum factors of passionate spirituality (31) and holistic small groups (37). The “treatment” to address these factors was initiated and extra communication was extended to the whole congregation to bring them along in the process. The theological basis for this study focused on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to bring new life to the body of Christ. New life for the church should result in individual lives being transformed as well. Kofahl set up the study to extend over one year with a simple pretest/posttest design. The second survey was actually taken fifteen months later to give more time for implementation of treatment. The posttest results revealed the minimum categories of passionate spirituality (40) and holistic small groups



(53) rose significantly. The research instrument showed gift-oriented ministry (37) as the new minimum that could now receive attention. The overall health rating for the church grew from a score of 42 up to 49, just under the national median score of fifty. Kofahl was also able to substantiate that an increase in church health did lead to an increase in average worship attendance. A four-year decline under his own ministry was interrupted with a 7 percent gain in attendance, from 193 to 209, over the year of the NCD study.

The third study available was designed by McKee and completed in 2003. He actually partnered with three other Beeson students on a project to observe the relationship between church health and church growth over four different denominations. For their collaborative research, some adjustment was made to the eight health characteristics developed by the model of Natural Church Development. A remodeled list of health indicators was presented that seemed to capture more accurately the essence of what makes a church grow. The eight health characteristics used in this study were empowering leadership, passionate spirituality, authentic community, functional structures, transforming discipleship, engaging worship, intentional evangelism, and mobilized laity—the changed factors being underlined. McKee grounded his research of church health in the theology of church as mission. He gave emphasis to the relationship between mission, church health, and church growth. A single survey was offered to all churches in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church denomination. McKee set up a sample of convenience for each survey by enlisting volunteers as NCD directs. Fifteen churches participated in a one-time assessment; seven reporting growth in worship attendance, three reporting no change in the last five years, and five reporting attendance decline over the past five years. McKee also sought to collect information on the practice of spiritual

disciplines for those volunteering to take the survey and found that those who do participate in regular spiritual disciplines rated their church's health higher than those who do not. In the end, he found a rather weak link between health and growth in the participating churches. Not all growing churches were healthy. Likewise, not all healthy churches were growing. This disparity in results is consistent with published NCD findings but contrary to what most church growth writers insisted to be true in the past.

The fourth dissertation reviewed was developed and completed by Borden in 2004. Again, the NCD survey began the intervention and provided the strategy for reversing church decline. Borden added the dimension of linking three churches for his research with the intent of functioning as an outside coach for the two churches in which he was not pastoring. The churches would follow the pre-, mid-, and posttest pattern over a twelve-month period. Each church supplied thirty volunteers from core leadership to be participants for the survey. Borden spent time with the leadership of each church following the pretest and mid-test to develop a strategy to use strengths to improve weaknesses. The theological basis for his study was built upon the foundation of moving a church towards biblical shalom. Church health was described in terms of wholeness. In Scripture, wholeness is rooted in the word shalom; therefore, his study examined the health of each church through the lens of biblical shalom. Borden experienced mixed results as he looked for the impact of NCD on the health and growth of each church. His own church saw improved health ratings for the minimum factor between the first two tests but not between the second and third. While only seeing a modest increase in the overall average score for his church, from 61 to 66, the church's average weekly worship attendance for that twelve-month period shot up 32 percent, from 473 to 630. The two

smaller churches saw significant changes in their minimum factor as a result of the treatment between tests but both experienced a drop in average worship attendance by the end of the twelve-month survey period. All three churches were located in the rapidly growing population of southwest Florida, so a failure to keep up with the surrounding surge might cause one to question the health of the church. Borden discussed contextual factors in his concluding remarks that seemed to make the interpretation of data more complex than one might imagine. Admittedly, layers of negative history in all three churches could have skewed the impact of NCD and the results of his research.

These dissertations all named as their purpose seeing if NCD or a variation of that model of church health could impact the growth of a church in a positive way with the hope of turning around those churches in decline or stagnation. They all observed some growth and improved health with the use of this instrument, but contrary to the NCD model, a direct cause-and-effect link was not established.

This dissertation project is unique. I chose to draw a random sample from the active membership of the church instead of the sample of convenience recommended by NCD. The NCD survey comes with the direction to enlist thirty volunteers from among those eligible. Eligibility is established according to several guidelines. This direction in essence sets up a sample of convenience. "Samples of convenience are, by definition, biased samples because they do not give each member of the population an equal chance of being selected. Thus, samples of convenience should be avoided" (Patten 74).

The NCD direction to enlist thirty volunteers also draws the issue of "self-selection bias" into the quality of research being carried out. The dissertations cited either used volunteers in their samples or introduced experimenter bias by choosing participants

from the eligible population. Volunteers differ in terms of motivation. They might introduce a positive or a negative bias to the sample and thereby slant the results (Wiersma 94). I use the following example to illustrate this point. An eager volunteer who desires to see change may have a tendency to answer the questions with a bias towards exaggerating the problems on the pretest and minimizing them on the posttest. Whereas, the opposite tendency might occur with a volunteer invested in keeping things the way they have always been. Randomization might still include both types of bias, but random selection prevents one kind of bias from being overrepresented in the sample.

Selection bias is an important issue in survey research according to Ralph Rosnow and Robert Rosenthal (*Essentials* 206). Bias cannot be eliminated entirely, but its influence can be minimized if the researcher is intentional when setting up the project design. The presence of bias is critical to the outcome because the process by which a person is selected for the sample can pose a threat to the internal validity of research. “Selection becomes a [negative] factor whenever subjects are not randomly selected” (Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh 261) Self-selection bias refers to the subject choosing for himself or herself whether to participate (Rosnow and Rosenthal, *Beginning Behavioral Research* 414). The weight of research standards pushes towards the goal of reducing the distortion that sampling bias or self-selection bias causes when creating the makeup of the sample.

A random sample is desired in research because it provides an unbiased sample in which all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected. The random nature of a sample is important because individual attitudes and perceptions used in a random sample may vary but only as they would due to normal fluctuations within the

group; therefore, “a random sample is representative of the population from which it was selected” (Wiersma 295). Random selection is one process used to eliminate selection bias and ensure representativeness when creating a sample.

Random selection can be accomplished by putting each name from the population onto a piece of paper and simply drawing names. For larger populations, it is more efficient to use a table of random numbers. To make this work, each member of the population is assigned a number name. “The number of digits in each member’s number name must be the same as the number of digits in the population size” (Patten 75). Mildred L. Patten and William Wiersma both give detailed explanations for using a table of random numbers.

The goal of randomization is to eliminate sampling bias or, in this case, self-selection bias that comes with using those who volunteer to complete the survey. The desired outcome at this point in the research is to obtain results from the sample and be able to make generalizations back to the population as a whole. According to research standards cited above, the suggested NCD practice of selecting thirty volunteers for the survey does not allow the researcher to generalize the findings to the population as a whole. Randomization makes generalization possible. Randomization is an important component that adds reliability to the research that follows.

### **Conclusions and Summary of Chapter**

In my observation of other dissertation projects and personal use of Natural Church Development, NCD seems to function much like a thermometer. It is a tool that gives a measurement. NCD is one way to take the temperature of a dead or declining church and assess the current condition. It can reveal sickness and affirm health, but by

itself it does not promote change. I have spoken with pastors who used the NCD questionnaire and received the results from the thirty surveys, but their churches chose to place the whole process on the shelf and not do anything.

A thermometer cannot change the temperature or affect the climate of the surrounding area. Change in temperature only comes with the installation of a thermostat. A thermostat is an instrument that is equipped to raise the temperature, if desired, by turning up the heat. For a church to experience an improvement in spiritual health and vitality, the pastor and leadership team must function like a thermostat. Only then is the possibility of change and growth within reach.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Statement of the Problem

The decline of the Christian church in the United States is widespread and, contrary to the thinking of some, affects more than just the mainline denominations. The statistic most often cited backs this trend: 85 percent of churches in the United States have plateaued or are declining in attendance. This statistic indicates approximately 340,000 churches need a turnaround (Reed 24). Of the hundreds of churches that have seen a turnaround in attendance, finances, purpose, and/or spirit, Eric Reed makes the following observations.

Some churches have experienced a dramatic turnaround. They went from a divided church, with a negative reputation, to a community of faith suddenly alive and growing. Some churches have seen a more subtle turnaround. Years of bland ministry and declining attendance have given way to a renewed sense of purpose and a fresh move of the Spirit of God. Reed concludes that all turnarounds are noteworthy, that renewed churches are once again advancing God's kingdom and sharing the gospel. "Yet even the more evangelistic denominations, focused on church planting, are battling inertia. Lyle Schaller's turn-of-the-millennium prediction is coming true: a few notable large churches are growing larger, but most churches, are growing smaller" (24). Reed found evidence throughout the responses in his study that declining churches can be turned around, often with better than expected results.

The first step in a turnaround is simply to help a congregation admit to a problem. Denial and confusion about the real issues often cloud the thinking of congregants as

pastor and/or leaders try to face reality. My study was designed to build upon the work of other recent dissertations that used Natural Church Development as a tool to assess the health of a congregation towards the end result of bringing about healthy change and renewal in the local church.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to determine if the application of research based on the eight quality characteristics of healthy churches as defined by Schwarz in his book *Natural Church Development* and the implementation of changes stemming from this research would renew the life of the Maquoketa United Methodist Church. The research questions reflect these goals.

#### **Research Question #1**

What level of church health currently exists in the Maquoketa United Methodist Church as measured by the Natural Church Development survey?

The answer to this question gave a baseline as to the health of this congregation at the beginning of the study period. Using Schwarz's testing instrument, the congregation was given an initial evaluation to assess the level of health among NCD's eight quality characteristics.

#### **Research Question #2**

Is there a positive relationship between worship attendance and the implementation of NCD strategy pairing ministry strength and minimum factor based on recommended ministry interventions?

This project was built on the hypothesis that by aggressively using a church's strengths to address its weaknesses, notable change in the church's health will be seen.



With an improvement in health is the expectation that growth in worship attendance will follow. The changes were revealed by the results of the second NCD survey.

### **Research Question #3**

What confounding variables have potentially impacted the observed changes in this church's health and growth?

Contextual factors that might affect the results of this study are called confounding variables and include such issues as community growth or population decline, change in context or status as new churches come into the community, staff additions or deletions, and denominational membership changes within the state of Iowa as a whole. These variables were partially identified in one of the questions on a posttest survey, which was given to all participants as they finished the NCD questionnaire. The questions for this component can be found in Appendix D. These responses were also combined with information gathered from demographic sources on the community itself, personal observations, input from my dissertation team, and denominational reports.

### **Design of the Study**

This was a quasi-experimental study. Once I began to become acquainted with the people in my new church, I started planning towards the date of the first survey. Thirty participants were selected utilizing a random number chart from those who received the letter mailed out in December 2006. A copy of the letter is in Appendix A. Those selected were invited to a lunch following worship on the designated Sunday. A brief explanation was given and questions answered, then the first survey was administered to those attending the lunch. The questionnaires were collected and sent to Natural Church Development to be tabulated. The results of the survey provided a picture of the "state of

the church” that leadership could then use to identify strengths and weaknesses in Schwarz’s eight specific areas.

When the results were received from the first survey, the leadership of the church met at a winter retreat to discuss implications and develop a strategy using the greatest strength to address the area of greatest weakness. This pairing of strength with weakness is the protocol recommended by NCD (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 56-57). The use of a retreat setting in which to process these results was chosen out of a desire to reinforce an existing pattern. A leadership retreat had been initiated one year before during their season without a pastor. I wished to build upon that positive step. The retreat also gave us an extended time in a relaxed setting to look into the new concepts of church health and begin the process of planning for implementation of the treatment.

The schedule for the leadership retreat is outlined in Appendix C. The members of Church Council and Vision Team were invited to come together for this day. The Vision Team met in the weeks prior to plan and prepare for the day. The retreat was held at a growing United Methodist church in a neighboring city. I hoped that their creative thinking might be stimulated by seeing the recent ministry innovations of another church.

The beginning component of the retreat involved a time of group building. While conflict had practically disappeared before my arrival, the absence of strife had not led to the presence of unity. The Vision Team planned for a time of community building at the beginning of the day. These less serious activities helped to foster a positive connection between various generations and interests represented. The congregation has a desire for fellowship among the three worship services. Unfortunately, fellowship has not occurred at this level. The opening games were a chance for the leadership from those various

styles of worship to connect on neutral ground. The worship component was scheduled at the end of the day to give time for unity to develop.

Another contextual factor that influenced the planning of this opening component was the arrangement of the church meeting room in Maquoketa. The monthly meeting of the Church Council was held in a room that had a large table with fourteen seats. The Council was made up of twenty-four members. The pattern that had been permitted over the years involved the use of a second row of chairs against the walls. With members seated in a pattern of inner circle and outer circle, this arrangement made face-to-face discussions impossible and unlikely when conflict or disagreement surfaced. Therefore, the goals of team building were to work through some of these negative dynamics of the past and establish some common ground upon which to plan for the new year of ministry.

The second major component of the day was a time devoted to unveiling the church profile. This component began with a small group discussion: “What does a healthy church look like?” Responses were charted on the board. After a few moments the discussion was shifted to a related question: “What are the characteristics of a growing Christian?” Vision Team members were given some direction and each took four people to lead through this time. We ended the discussion by reading Mark 4:3-20 (the parable of the sower) and asked how the parable related to church health. The main idea highlighted from these verses was that seed growth happened without any human effort, other than the act of planting. The farming illustration is a picture of how growth is designed into nature. That same design is part of the fabric and pattern of how growth is supposed to happen for a church. NCD asserts that when a healthy balance or harmonic interplay among the identified quality characteristics of a church is present, the automatic

growth that results is quite predictable. The retreat was designed with time to unpack the essence of NCD's eight health characteristics before the full group.

The last step of this discussion explained the results of our church profile. Each group was asked to collect responses and share first impressions. A break for lunch allowed this information to sink in and questions to surface around table discussions. The Vision Team was prepared for the possibility of varied reactions in relationship to the high and low factors named, but those present thought the profile fit the essence of who we were, given the present circumstances.

The goal setting component followed lunch. I contextualized the church profile by connecting the effort that occurred on the retreat with the work that had been done at the end of the previous year. We started with two church goals named by Charge Conference: (1) reaching young adults and families, and (2) improving church communication. A process of brainstorming was used to connect the minimum factor with these stated goals. This process discovered where God was working in people's imaginations and provided a list of possibilities. This creative time developed a sense of ownership for what was to come. These leaders would provide the first wave of communication and interpretation for the broader congregation. Small groups were given time to detail several strategies in relation to the goals proposed and then shared with the larger gathering.

The time for the brainstorming component was limited; therefore, someone would be needed to carry the process forward. Before the retreat came to a close, discussion shifted to the appointment of a Church Health Implementation Team (NCD Team). The NCD implementation material recommended a follow-up team once the profile was

shared with leadership. “This team will be responsible for suggesting a course of action regarding the church’s minimum factor. **The team will be responsible for setting a plan with a timeline and will then guide the church through the process** [original emphasis]” (*Minimum Factor Manual* 9).

NCD recommends the team be made up of people who are spiritually mature, strategic thinkers, committed to seeing the church become healthier. This team needs those who are able to see the bigger picture and not get lost in the details. Individuals were nominated to serve for the following roles: team leader, strategic thinker, researcher, intercessor, communicator, and members of the ministry team who most closely relate to the minimum factor (*Minimum Factor Manual* 9-10). Although this team will meet together twice a month and lead the church through the NCD process, they will expand involvement by inviting others into times of planning and implementation. The NCD team will report to the Church Council and give monthly progress updates. The timeline for this intervention will be communicated in the church newsletter and presented in Sunday worship. Early attention will be given to working with opinion holders and enlisting the support of key influencers on the Church Council. When changes are proposed or initiated, the NCD team will check in with these key leaders to keep communication lines functioning.

The leadership retreat ended with worship. The service included a time to gather reflections from the day and celebrate Communion. The single loaf of bread was a symbol intended to capture the growing sense of unity among the leadership team of the church.

After twelve months, the NCD instrument was issued a second time to measure any changes in the areas surveyed. At the close of this second session, all survey participants were given a form with a mix of open-ended and objective questions to which they were asked to give a written response. These responses provided data to evaluate how the NCD concepts were understood among the congregation. This form was also a way to gather their impressions about any confounding variables that could have affected the church during this year. A broad response was desired so all participants were involved in this debriefing step. The total study process can be diagrammed as follows (Wiersma 146):



The “Os” in the diagram represent pretesting and posttesting of the church’s health. The “X” represents the twelve-month time period between each survey in which a strategic “treatment” was applied to the minimum factor. The aim of the second survey was to assess the health of the church according to the eight quality characteristics and to determine whether application of the church’s strengths alongside the area of weakness made any significant difference.

The strategic treatment was designed to go into effect during the yearlong observation period. This study focused upon the effects of that ministry intervention. This project also put something positive into the congregational system at two other levels. The procedure of filling out the NCD survey was deemed to be the first positive contribution in this renewal process. From my reading on the placebo and Rosenthal effects, I believe the presence of these psychological dynamics can impact the evaluation process. Our knowledge of these effects can be gleaned from the medical community.

One source summarizes the influence of a placebo as simply, “I believe my treatment is good for me; therefore I will get better” (“Understanding the Placebo Effect”). In this church setting, that dynamic could show up when those taking the survey believe something positive will happen, and their belief is what brings improvement, regardless of what is done to follow up with the survey recommendations. This influence can also tie into the Rosenthal effect, which says positive experimenter bias can affect the results of this project (Rosenthal). The Rosenthal effect suggests that my personal “expectancy can become a self-fulfilling prophecy of the [church’s] response” (“2001 James McKeen Cattell”). The impact of these dual effects could play into the results and are discussed further in my conclusions.

The feedback delivered with the first set of results was processed with the leadership of the church on a winter retreat. This retreat was another component of the renewal process that helped to lay support for what would follow. The leadership retreat provided recommendations for program change and new goals. The strategy developed and implemented following the first NCDQ would be the main ministry intervention designed to link the church’s strength with the minimum factor.

As previous dissertations were surveyed, a progression of methodologies could be observed. Kofahl interviewed the first doctoral student to use NCD in a dissertation. From a phone conversation with Mitchell Pierce, Kofahl quotes Pierce as speaking to the usefulness of NCD in his local ministry (69). Pierce only used NCD to establish the baseline of health in his church but recommended that future studies do a posttest six to twelve months later to measure any growth or change in minimum factors. Kofahl then proceeded to implement that pattern of pretest, treatment, posttest in his dissertation in

2000. At the same time, Adams was utilizing the testing pattern of pre-, mid-, and posttest, with interventions added in seven-month intervals ( $O \rightarrow X \rightarrow O \rightarrow X \rightarrow O$ ; 91). I took from her conclusions that a longer interval between testing might be useful. A longer interval would allow for more of the intervention strategies to be incorporated into the church's action plan before having to take the next survey because each survey generated a new set of suggestions and strategies (137). Borden used the same pattern in his dissertation with six-month intervals and heard in his exit interviews that participants wished for a longer period between tests for implementation to take effect (147).

As I set up my project, I decided to back off from three testing dates and use only two for several reasons. My goal was to complete my research within twelve months. I also found upon arrival the remnants of two inflammatory surveys. These had caused much tension between the two Sunday services. Given the negative history around surveys, I referred to this instrument in public as a questionnaire, not a survey. I also determined to change the methodology and use only two test dates. In so doing, I was able to extend the study interval from a six-month period to a twelve-month period. This pattern incorporated some of the recommendations from the findings of Adams and Borden.

Throughout the intervention process, I kept a journal in order to document the church's progress, track outcomes from meetings, and record where glitches seemed to interfere with the process.



## Population and Participants

The population in this study was defined as active members in the congregation of the First United Methodist Church in Maquoketa, Iowa. The term “active” is defined in the criteria listed below along with other NCD limitations:

1. Survey limit of thirty participants,
2. One person from any immediate family,
3. Members actively involved in the life and ministry of the church, such as participation in a ministry, Sunday school class, small group, or Bible study.

My dissertation team worked through the membership list of the church to determine eligibility according to the described limitations. A pool of 128 people met the criteria. A notice about the coming questionnaire was mailed to these individuals. The focus of the letter stressed the importance of their support. Each name was assigned a corresponding three-digit number. A simple random sample was drawn from those eligible using the Table of Random Numbers (Patten 138). My dissertation team secured thirty-five people who were willing to come on the day of the first survey. An intentional surplus was built in to allow for some people being unable to attend the date scheduled. The five extra names would provide some margin so that the thirty-person minimum could be maintained. The first thirty people, in order of the random number chart, to arrive for the lunch on the date of the questionnaire became the subjects for this study. The extra participants were invited to stay for lunch and then allowed to look over a copy of the questionnaire if they wanted.

## **Instrumentation**

The primary instrument for this study was the Natural Church Development questionnaire developed by Christoph Schalk, a German social scientist and psychologist. In a massive research project conducted by Schalk and Schwarz, this survey was given in eighteen languages in over one thousand churches in thirty-two countries on six continents. In each country studied, the values were normed to a median score of 50, meaning, the “average church” in that country would have had a quality index of 50 for each of the eight characteristics. Declining churches typically scored below the median while growing churches scored above the median in each of the eight essential areas (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 38). After Schalk revised the questionnaire tool as part of his doctoral studies at the University of Wuerzburg, the updated version has been given to 34,314 persons in 1,188 churches in thirty-two countries (Schwarz and Schalk 232).

The outcome of Schwarz and Schalk’s study was the naming of eight vital qualities that can be measured quantitatively. The various components of each quality characteristic include the following:

**1. Empowering Leadership:** For this quality the survey evaluates the relationship between pastor and congregation, the sharing of ministry with lay leadership, and the pastor’s commitment in multiplying new leaders through discipling, equipping, training, and mentoring them in that development process, all towards motivating the church towards positive change.

**2. Gift-Oriented Ministry:** The survey evaluates such areas as understanding of spiritual gifts, matching those gifts in ministry, and working towards putting a gift-mobilization system in place for the church.

**3. Passionate Spirituality:** The survey evaluates personal spiritual practices, corporate spiritual disciplines, and the enthusiasm about the church.

**4. Functional Structures:** The survey evaluates the organizational structures, systems, and leadership process, which either allows or impedes the multiplication of ministry.

**5. Inspiring Worship Services:** The survey evaluates each person's sense of inspiration in worship, life transformation as a result of the preaching, visitor friendliness, level of celebrative music, and the God-centered focus of services.

**6. Holistic Small Groups:** The survey evaluates the atmosphere of transparency and trust in the smaller gatherings within the church. It looks at the spiritual orientation of those groups, relevance of teaching topics to daily life, and their effectiveness towards multiplying disciples, new leaders, and other small groups.

**7. Need-Oriented Evangelism:** The survey evaluates personal commitment to evangelism, identification of those with the gift of evangelism, church-wide evangelism strategies, seeker sensitivity of the congregation, and assimilation of new Christians.

**8. Loving Relationships:** The survey evaluates the presence of joy and trust, interdependence of relationships, practice of encouragement, and conflict resolution practices within the congregation (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 22-37).

Although the primary goal of NCD is health and not growth, NCD research has also shown that improving quality in a church's minimum factor often results in

quantitative church growth. In fact, if all eight quality characteristics measure 65 or higher on the scale of 1 to 100, the church is almost certain to grow. Schwarz refers to this phenomenon as the “65 hypothesis.” This hypothesis states that whenever all eight values score 65 or higher, the statistical probability that the church is growing is 99.4 percent (*Natural Church Development* 40).

### **Reliability and Validity**

Each church’s profile scores represent standard scores based on a mean of 50 with a standard deviation of 15. The eight scales of the church profile based on the revised questionnaire (as a result of Schalk’s study) have a reliability between  $r=0.75$  and  $r=0.89$ , depending on the individual scale. Table 3.1 lists these findings.

**Table 3.1. Reliability of the Revised NCD Questionnaire**

<u>Quality Characteristic</u>	<u>Reliability</u>
Empowering leadership	0.84
Gift-oriented ministry	0.87
Passionate spirituality	0.75
Functional structures	0.82
Inspiring worship service	0.77
Holistic small groups	0.89
Need-oriented evangelism	0.82
Loving relationships	0.77

Source: Schalk 37-44.

The validity of the church profile was ensured in three ways:

1. A “confirmatory factor analysis” was used to determine if the theoretically designed data structure could be found in the data. This practice is a “statistical method that is used to determine the number of underlying dimensions contained in a set of observed variables and to identify the subset of variables that corresponds to each of the underlying dimensions” (Muthen). The result was that the eight characteristics not only made sense on paper but were scientifically sound.

2. The external criterion of growing churches showed a high correlation between growth and the eight characteristics. They tested this premise by looking at declining churches and growing churches. Declining churches all scored very low in these eight qualities, whereas growing churches scored high in all eight of these areas.

3. Schwarz and Schalk’s analysis determined that the questions assigned to each quality area have a high correlation with each other (up to +0.82) while a low correlation corresponds to the questions assigned to other quality characteristics (233-34).

## **Variables**

The independent variable in this study is the strategic intervention used during the twelve-month study. The intervention or turnaround strategy implemented was based on the level of health revealed after the first survey. This “treatment,” in essence, designed a way to respond effectively to the testing results by linking the ministry strength with the minimum factor.

The NCDQ has been detailed in previous sections, but here I want to establish that the survey tool and the process of asking church members to fill it out served as a preparation for the main intervention. In asking people to come together as a group, I

hoped to create an atmosphere of positive expectation. This impetus was hoped to initiate momentum to bring about future change. I hoped to harness the positive energy of the Rosenthal effect. They were very much aware that the church had weaknesses and problems. They were now part of a process that was going to work towards growth and intentional planning to respond to those needs. This event also created a sense of community and a core of people who were taking responsibility for the future vitality of this church.

Dependent variables include the level of health in each one of the quality characteristics, the amount of change over the twelve months of the study as reflected in the post-study survey results, and the resulting growth as reflected in the average weekly worship attendance.

### **Data Collection**

The NCD survey is an inventory of ninety-one questions. The test was administered to thirty people identified from a random sampling of core leaders and active members in the church. While these participants were essentially the same for each testing period, some variance on the date of the second survey occurred. A weekend snow storm made involvement difficult for a number of participants. The thirty subjects were invited to gather for a meal where they were told that the purpose of the survey was to discover the strengths and weaknesses of our church. After this brief explanation, they completed the survey. Thirty completed surveys were mailed to ChurchSmart for computerized tabulation. When each set of test results was returned, it was accompanied with a recommended strategy on how to proceed given the current assessment of our church health. At the close of the second testing point, each person was given a form with

a mix of open-ended and objective questions to which they were asked to give a written response. Their responses would give data to evaluate how the NCD church health concepts were being understood, their perceptions as to outside factors that might have influenced any measured change, whether positive or negative, in church health, and a read on how they personally experienced the process.

The following questions were used:

1. Circle the top 5 characteristics that make a healthy church.

Low levels of conflict	Empowered lay leadership	Loving relationships
Gift-oriented lay ministry	Contemporary music	Functional structures
Need-oriented evangelism	Balanced annual budget	Engaging worship
Inflow of new believers	Passionate spirituality	Healthy small groups
Missional outreach focus	Dynamic vision	Biblical preaching
Growing worship attendance		

2. In light of what you have heard regarding church health in the last year, how would you rate our church's health at the time of the first questionnaire?

(1 = not healthy, 10 = very healthy; circle one number)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate our church's health today?

(1 = not healthy, 10 = very healthy)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

4. Name other factors in the local context (church or community) that might account for changes in the church's health?

5. What was this survey process like for you personally? (the first test, the leadership retreat—if you attended that event, the recommended program changes, the follow-up test today, etc.)

What was helpful? What was not?

The first question has to do with Natural Church Development. Question #1 was an objective way to measure each person's grasp of the concept of church health. The eight key principles covered in the survey are intermingled with factors that are sometimes the result of improved health, but not the cause (i.e., fully funded budget, inflow of new believers). Components from the church growth model such as increasing attendance in worship and dynamic vision, were added. The choice of dynamic vision and missional outreach focus are the only options not included in the church health measurement that other literature indicated should factor into the making of a healthy church. They would be acceptable answers in addition to the eight that Schwarz names. The desire for lower conflict and the hot-button issue of contemporary music were listed as possible distractions, as was the often single-solution answer of biblical preaching. Some of these characteristics were shown in Schwarz's research to be outside the universal principles of church health. Questions #2 and #3 were designed to measure individual perception of their church's own health. Both questions gave answers that can be compared to the level of health as measured by the NCD questionnaire. These questions gave a way to measure those deeply held convictions about the state of the church and then check them against the NCD survey results. At this point a shift was made from objective questions to open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were used to allow for more individualized responses from each person. The fourth question has to



do with the concern about the influence of outside factors upon the witnessed outcomes. These responses were combined with information gathered from other community demographics to answer research question #3. The last question is an open invitation to receive comments regarding any aspect of the process or the perceived results. This question was designed to collect insight that might be useful when making recommendations for further study in my conclusion.

### **Data Analysis**

The NCD surveys were collected and mailed to ChurchSmart Resources headquarters in St. Charles, Illinois, for computerized tabulation. The results came back within a week. The packet included implementation suggestions based on the profile and information resources that could be shared with my leadership team.

At the end of the second evaluation date, I carefully read the comments on the individual response sheets to analyze the data from the debriefing survey. For question #1, I looked for how many individuals picked responses from the eight central factors named in NCD. The responses to questions #2 and #3 were compared to the level of health measured by the beginning and ending church profiles. When analyzing the responses to the last two questions, I looked for recurring themes and comments. I tried to identify points of agreement and disagreement when divergent perspectives occurred.

Once the findings were processed and grouped into categories, I made some interpretations based on themes raised in the debriefing questions. I looked for cause-and-effect relationships as well as other relationships of significance.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### Profile of Participants

Those involved in the two surveys included a range of long-term members (50+ years in the church) and recent members. The racial configuration of the congregation was almost exclusively Caucasian, which carried over into the sample. Participants numbered one-third more female (eighteen) than male (twelve), which paralleled the ratio of female to male in the eligible population as determined by the NCD requirements. The age of participants ranged from 35 to 80 years of age, 59 being the average age, 56 being the median age, and 70 being the mode age.

Several guidelines governed the selection of people for the sample. NCD directions stipulated all participants must be active members of the church. The term “active” was defined as those members involved in the life and ministry of the church, such as being involved in a ministry, adult Sunday school class, small group, or Bible study. The sample was further limited to only one person from any immediate family.

Following the process of random selection, on 7 January 2007, thirty members of the First United Methodist Church in Maquoketa gathered to complete the first NCD survey. The responses were mailed to ChurchSmart Resources in St. Charles, Illinois, for tabulation, and within a week the results were returned. The church received a packet containing the following information: the church profile, a copy of the *Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development* (Schwarz and Schalk), a copy of *The ABC's of Natural Church Development* (Schwarz), a *Minimum Factor Manual* (Schwarz) to help in assessing the scores, and four pages of evaluative questions (specific to its minimum

factor) to use as discussion starters when beginning to plan next steps for the church. Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1 report the results of this first survey. I chose to present my church profile results in Chapter 4 using both formats. The table format provides actual number ratings for each health characteristic while the graph is appealing to those who wish to see the results displayed in a visual format. The median score for churches in the United States is 50. Because NCD is an international project, each country's median is calculated separately. This median is the benchmark against which First Church was compared when tabulating this profile.

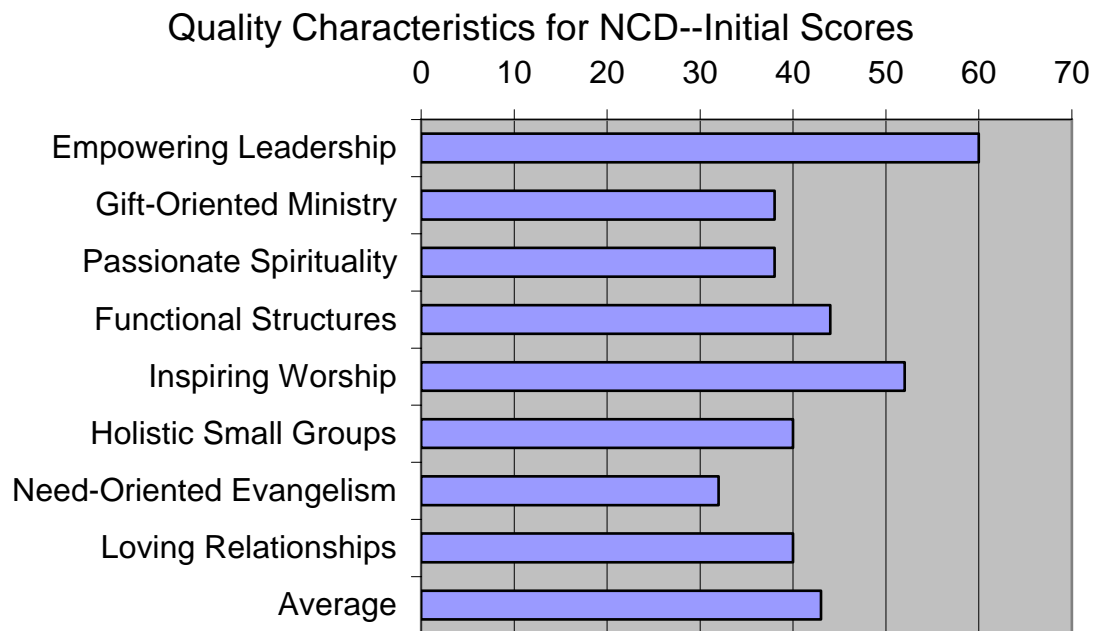
**Table 4.1. First Church Profile Results—Survey #1**

<b>Church health characteristic</b>	<b>January 2007</b>
Empowering leadership	60 (maximum factor)
Gift-oriented ministry	38
Passionate spirituality	38
Functional structures	44
Inspiring worship	52
Holistic small groups	40
Need-oriented evangelism	32 (minimum factor)
Loving relationships	40
<b>Average score</b>	<b>43</b>

### **Initial Health Levels for First Church**

The purpose of this study was to determine if the application of research based on the eight NCD quality characteristics of healthy churches and the implementation of changes stemming from this research would renew the spiritual life and vitality of the

First United Methodist Church of Maquoketa. This survey was the first step in seeking an answer to *Research Question #1: What level of church health currently exists in the Maquoketa United Methodist Church as measured by the Natural Church Development survey?* The NCD survey assessed health levels and determined a baseline index rating for each quality characteristic. Figure 4.1 provides the initial church profile as a graph.



**Figure 4.1. First Church profile—January 2007.**

The January 2007 survey revealed that six out of eight health indicators were below the North American median score of 50. Only the maximum factor of empowering leadership (with a score of 60) and the characteristic of inspiring worship (rated at 52) scored above the U. S. median. The survey revealed need-oriented evangelism to be the minimum factor. The low minimum score of 32 indicated the challenge that was before the church if a turnaround was to be successfully initiated. The minimum factor would

become the focal point of the leadership retreat and subsequent leadership team discussions. The essence of the treatment design (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 50-53, 116) involved leveraging our maximum factor (empowering leadership) to bring improvement in the church's minimum factor (need-oriented evangelism).

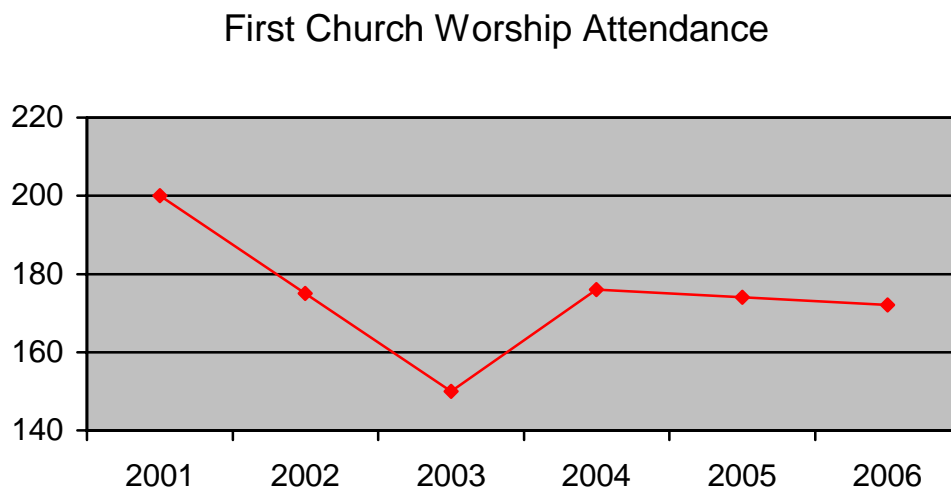
The NCD survey also took into account the attendance trend of the church to see if improvement in the eight health characteristics would actually enhance the average worship attendance. Increased worship attendance is suggested by NCD as a natural by-product of improved quality (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 45). The pastor's questionnaire asked for average total attendance at weekend services, with a second space to identify the number of children included in this count. NCD research typically only includes adult attendance, but the version of the instrument used for this project had an allowance for children built into the data collection process. The pastor's survey asked for the average number of children in worship as a separate piece of data. Using totals submitted annually to the denomination, with numbers for adults and children combined, the attendance trend for the last five years is graphed in Figure 4.2. Table 4.2 also identifies the percentage of change from year to year (2001-2006).

**Table 4.2. Average Worship Attendance over the Last Five Years**

<b>First Church</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Worship attendance	200	175	150	176	174	172
% of change		-12.5	-14.3	+17.3	-1.14	-1.15

The five years prior to 2001, average worship attendance held at two hundred people per week. First Church had been plateaued and unable to break the two hundred

barrier. The downward slide of the first three years on the graph was interrupted by a pastoral change. Even though 2004 shows a rebound in average worship, the internal conflict and unresolved issues continued to erode the health of the congregation. Waning health took a further toll on average worship attendance, precipitating another pastoral change in 2006. I arrived in July of that year after the church had been six months without a pastor. My arrival came as the average worship attendance for the first six months of the year dropped back to the all-time low of 150 in 2003. That fact is not revealed by these annual statistics. The coming of a new pastor repeated the predictable pattern of a rebound in the second half of 2006. **The overall picture is still one of a church in decline.** I am hopeful that the data provided in the first profile would be a motivation for church leaders to begin planning towards a successful church turnaround.



**Figure 4.2. Worship attendance from 2001-2006.**

After analyzing the first profile, those on the leadership retreat had first chance for response. The maximum and minimum did not stir much discussion, but the score for

inspiring worship, our second highest factor, was cause for surprise on all sides. Several members could not believe we would rate ourselves so highly for worship. Improvement in that area was a sign of encouragement, given the recent “worship wars.” The competition between a contemporary service and a traditional service had been one source of much pain and misunderstanding. I began to hope this positive rating was an indicator that those wrinkles were leveling out and people’s hurts were beginning to heal.

Our maximum factor of empowering leadership was affirmed by all present. They had not only survived six months without a pastor but had actually made the shift from receiving pastoral ministry to doing pastoral ministry. Early on I asked how they felt about what had happened, and I found them energized instead of exhausted from doing everything. One lay speaker who was preaching twice a month commented, “I can’t wait to finish my job every Friday, so that I can start getting ready for Sunday and what I do for God. I’ve found my niche and am eager to do more in ministry.” Several shared stories with me of the challenges they overcame and difficulties they negotiated during those months. They believed lay ministry had finally been accepted by the congregation. I could see why this quality characteristic had received the highest score.

The minimum factor of need-oriented evangelism was also affirmed as an accurate representation of their current ministry. Some leaders regretted this reality, but they did well looking in the mirror and facing the truth. I remember feeling puzzled concerning one aspect of their history during my initial interview with church leaders. They filled me in regarding the recent departure of several youth directors. The ministry they described sounded successful to me yet three successive leaders had been dismissed. Older church members had been offended by the style and tenor of the ministry. They

had not known what to do with all the unchurched youth that the ministry attracted. The evangelistic tone of a fairly cutting-edge youth ministry had not been well-received by the church. Confusion and lack of guidance led to the disappearance of the youth ministry altogether. One leader made an honest confession: “We’re really not very good at evangelism. That’s just not who we are as a church, I guess.” The survey results reflected the lack of this quality trait accurately, given the current attitude among many members.

### **Improvement by Linking Strength with Weakness**

Churches are similar to people; they get discouraged if all they focus on is the problem or weakness of the group. The theory behind this strategy of NCD is to take the positive energy undergirding the strength of a church and tie it to the treatment that seeks to address the weakness of the church. *Research Question #2: Is there a positive relationship between worship attendance and the implementation of NCD strategy pairing ministry strength and minimum factor based on recommended ministry interventions?* This question sought to evaluate this NCD strategy. NCD asserts that a positive relationship exists between their strategy and worship attendance. One of the pieces of evidence by which to evaluate the truth of this hypothesis is Figure 4.4 (p. 132), which shows the average worship attendance at the end of the treatment year.

### **Ministry Intervention Design**

The leadership retreat participants began discussing a plan of action based on printed resources, specific to our minimum factor, that were included in the NCD church packet. These prepared resources were not a recipe for implementation as much as they served to stimulate our own creativity and point us in a useful direction. We discerned for ourselves how to employ our maximum factor in building up our weakness. The NCD



process allowed flexibility and challenged us to contextualize the principles we were learning. At times I wished for a “canned process,” something already to go, so that we could get past the planning stage. As frustrating as this process was for some on the leadership team, including myself, this lack of a simple formula turned out to be a blessing. We had to exercise our own spiritual gifts and employ resources native to our faith community, which resulted in self-confidence and increased personal growth.

At the January leadership retreat, members listed ideas, shared where they saw God leading us in relation to our NCD profile, and also contributed to a time of brainstorming around felt-needs in our community. Time constraints did not allow for the development of a full plan, so an NCD team was appointed to finish the process. This smaller team mapped out the following strategy to raise our minimum factor.

**1. Call to prayer.** Prayer support is encouraged by NCD as a good first step and a necessary component when needing to stir spiritual momentum in a plateaued or declining church (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 106-07).

The NCD team planned the following action step in response. The church would participate in a spring and fall observance called “40 Days of Prayer.” Participants would gather to support the renewal of the church by undergirding each ministry with prayer.

**2. Call to evangelism.** The *Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development* suggested we try to win existing small groups and ministry teams to the task of need-oriented evangelism (Schwarz and Schalk 108-09). Not all people have this spiritual gift—only about 10 percent of Christians do—but at the very least, all believers can be supportive of evangelism. This step seemed like a good fit with what God is doing in the church. It would call our maximum factor—empowered leadership—into action,

for everyone on the implementation team was functioning as a small group leader. They were going to be leaders in this process of renewal. Each small group would function like Velcro, helping new people connect in the life of our faith community.

The NCD team planned the following action steps in response. First, we would connect with small groups in the life of the church and invite them to begin to think and act more evangelistically. They would be asked to participate in the upcoming emphasis on reaching out by preparing a “prospect list” and praying for people they might invite to worship, agreeing to function as greeters for visitors in Sunday worship, providing contact for follow-up with these visitors, and making a special point to give an invitation to the people on their prospect list ahead of each “Bring a Friend Day.” They were also asked to consider how they could connect with the felt needs of those outside of our church either through service or programming.

Second, we would strategically schedule a spring and fall “Bring a Friend Day.”

Third, I would preach a sermon series in the summer to lift up the value of evangelism and outreach entitled “Going Fishing—the Adventure of Living as a Contagious Christian!”

**3. Call to faith.** The NCD team would present two “faith challenges” to church leaders when these steps were adopted. NCD recommends church leaders establish a stretch goal to build enthusiasm and momentum for the coming changes (Schwarz and Schalk 26). Both goals lifted up by the team would connect us with needs in the community and serve to focus attention on our minimum factor.

The NCD team planned the following action steps in response. First, the church would sponsor a servant-evangelism outreach event in the summer. **Faith Challenge #1**

would be a free car wash for the community. **Faith Challenge #2** set a goal of raising \$5,000 towards the local Habitat for Humanity project. Finances were behind for the year. This goal would be a huge stretch in light of our other financial obligations.

**4. Call to discernment.** There would be ongoing discussion to discern which “felt needs” in our community God was calling our church to address. The initial leadership retreat named these issues: divorce care and recovery, parenting classes, mentoring for teens/children, marriage enrichment, and recovery for addictions and alcohol abuse.

The NCD team planned the following action steps in response. First, hospitality would be extended to those who come to the Community Food Pantry housed in the basement of the church. During the winter months, a cup of hot coffee might be a particularly effective way to share the kindness of God with a segment of the community that our church has not been able to reach very effectively in the past. The goal is connection with the last, the least, and the lost. Second, we would plan to initiate programming in response to one of the felt needs listed on the retreat.

**5. Call to stewardship.** A financial commitment would be requested from the Church Leadership towards these initiatives. The resources need to be made available so that follow-through and implementation does not get short-circuited.

The NCD team planned the following action steps in response. First, the Trustees would be asked to provide better signage on site and around town. We need to make our church more user-friendly for potential visitors and easier to find. The building fund has money by which these changes and improvements can be carried out. We asked that they respond to this need by the end of the summer. Our church was host site for the annual district United Methodist Women’s meeting in September, which meant women from all

over the newly formed East-Central District would be trying to find our church. New signs would certainly help care for all the lost people coming to town on that day.

Second, we would request that “seed money” from undesignated endowment interest be committed to evangelism and outreach expenses this year. An advertising plan would be implemented for Advent, Easter, and back-to-school seasons. We would explore developing a new Web site and the feasibility of buying radio spots, newspaper ads, door hangers, and initiating door-to-door visitation.

### **Ministry Intervention Implementation**

The previous section detailed the NCD team strategy for implementing the ministry intervention. These plans came together after much prayer and discussion. The next step in the process involved putting the plan into action. The following section summarizes what occurred under each priority.

**Call to prayer.** The “40 Days of Prayer” emphasis was held in the spring and fall of 2007. An interested layperson was enlisted to develop a daily prayer guide to include needs of our church, community, country, and world. Thirty-three volunteers made commitments in the spring. Prayer guides in the fall were handed out to everyone in worship who was willing to make a commitment to pray. We doubled the participation this time. A kickoff event at the beginning helped to explain what was expected and a closing prayer gathering helped to collect the good news of what God had done through each season of additional prayer.

A second layer of prayer support involved a ministry that would be ongoing. We added to an existing prayer chain by starting an e-mail prayer chain. An e-mail notice triggered weekly prayer support for crisis needs and prayer requests during the week.

**Evangelistic small groups.** The Church Council accepted this priority and set the goal to reach 75 percent of all groups in this step. That goal would involve thirteen of the eighteen active groups in the life of our church. So far only the six small group leaders and new Bible study groups have been involved in this process of building a prospect list and connecting with new people. I presented a list of the fifty-four first-time visitors from worship and asked these leaders to include some new people on their prospect lists.

The “Bring a Friend Day” in the fall was scheduled after the road construction project first finished. We received several new visitors. This success excited me because we had not seen any visitors during the previous four months of road construction. We hosted an open house Sunday during Advent and again saw a number of visitors. This event was assisted by a month of local radio advertising and 150 door hangers placed in adjacent neighborhoods.

The sermon series on evangelism during the summer was all about fishing. People were invited to submit fishing pictures and several individuals brought wall-mounted trophy fish. The pictures were projected on the sanctuary screen to kick off each week’s sermon. The personal participation served to keep people engaged in the ongoing discussion about fishing for souls.

The surprise in this area came by way of one leader who offered to teach an adult Sunday school class during the summer on “Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts.” NCD encourages the church to identify persons who have the gift of evangelism and enlist them in outreach ministries (Schwarz and Schalk 106). Several people recognized their giftedness as evangelists from this class and volunteered to help with the free car wash as a practical way to put their spiritual gift into action.

**Faith challenges #1 and #2.** The Church Council accepted both faith challenges and completed them before the end of the summer.

The free car wash was actually fun. Church Council members worked with the youth to make it happen. The youth group decided to continue the free factor through the rest of the weekend as they had been scheduled to do the car wash on Sunday afternoon.

The challenge goal on behalf of Habitat for Humanity was raised in only three special offerings. This goal initially caused some concern from leaders on the Finance Committee because we were behind in other areas. Donations were all above and beyond pledges and regular giving. The generous financial response was encouraging.

The surprise in this area of servant evangelism came as several church members decided to host the local whole road construction crew for lunch at the church one time in August. The street access to the church was restricted (and sometimes closed) starting in July for a major paving project. Instead of complaining, I was blessed to see members reaching out to the crew they had to drive around each day. As the road construction stretched into October, the Evangelism Committee was willing to help me deliver donuts, freshly baked cookies, and cold pop to the crew members once a week (three times) until the end of their work. God's kindness and love were communicated in a way that proved most effective.

**Discernment of felt needs in the community.** The discussion continued, but no leaders were available to initiate ministry engaging the target needs. Current leaders are busy leading groups focused internally. I am praying God would reveal a starting point for these new ministries. I have a number of divorced attendees/members, and I plan to meet with them, hear their stories, assess their leadership abilities, and share about the

possibility of them leading a support group designed to reach out to the community.

Divorce recovery is the felt need I feel God is asking our church to prepare to meet.

The first steps towards a recovery ministry occurred as I began to meet people in need of recovery. Every Friday morning people line up at our door to visit the Community Food Pantry housed in our church. Hospitality with a cup of coffee was extended twice late fall with good response. Sharing coffee provided a positive connection with those we do not normally see in worship. Several laypeople from the church have taken an interest in serving in the food pantry on days when it is open to the community. It is usually staffed by volunteers from other churches and the community.

**Financial commitment.** Seed money was advanced in the amount of \$250 for advertising before Christmas. The church purchased forty radio spots on the local station, and they granted us matching funds to double our money. Door hangers were placed by the youth in three neighborhoods of town near the church.

Because of the local road construction, no progress on updating signage on site or around town has occurred. A new church Web site is in progress and will be up soon.

### **Treatment Results**

This project was built upon the hypothesis that by aggressively using a church's strength to address its weakness, notable change in the church's health will result. We now have a chance to see if the second part of this hypothesis is true—namely, if health is improved then worship attendance will increase as a natural by-product of this change.

The second survey revealed a double digit improvement for First Church in two areas: gift-oriented ministry and need-oriented evangelism. Gift-oriented ministry increased by sixteen points while need-oriented evangelism saw a ten-point gain.

Evangelism now stands tied with loving relationships as the minimum factor, given the increases in several other low indexes. The only factor to experience a loss was worship. Inspiring worship declined by four points. The overall average for First Church moved from a score of 43 up to a score of 49, an improvement of six points.

In the comparison of the two church profiles in Table 4.3 and Figure 4.3, one can see that the ministry intervention detailed previously did result in an increase in the quality of church health for the year in which the treatment was put into action. I was pleased to see evidence of our progress. On the following page, I present data on worship attendance (see Table 4.4 and Figure 4.4) that supports Schwarz's prediction that improved church health can also impact average worship attendance. First Church reported an increase from 172 per week in 2006, to an average of 182 per week for the year 2007. The data reveals a modest gain of 5.8 percent for the year of treatment.

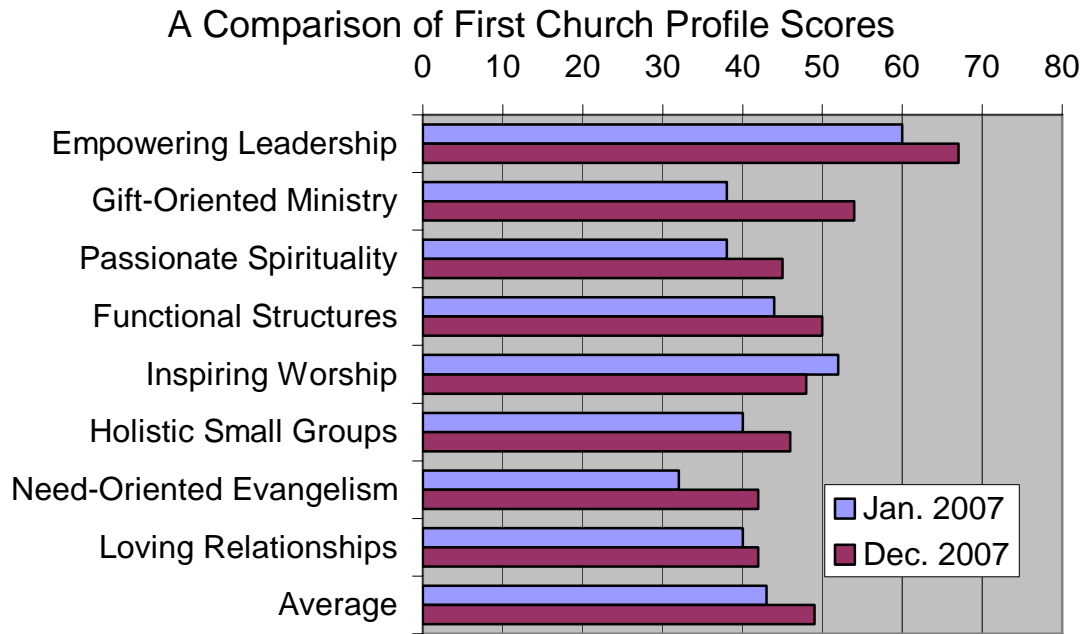
**Table 4.3. First Church Profile Results—Surveys #1 and #2**

Church Health Characteristic	January 2007	December 2007	Change
Empowering leadership	60	67 (max.)	+7
Gift-oriented ministry	38	54	+16
Passionate spirituality	38	45	+7
Functional structures	44	50	+6
Inspiring worship	52	48	-4
Holistic small groups	40	46	+6
Need-oriented evangelism	32	42 (min.)	+10
Loving relationships	40	42 (min.)	+2
<b>Average Scores</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>+6 points</b>

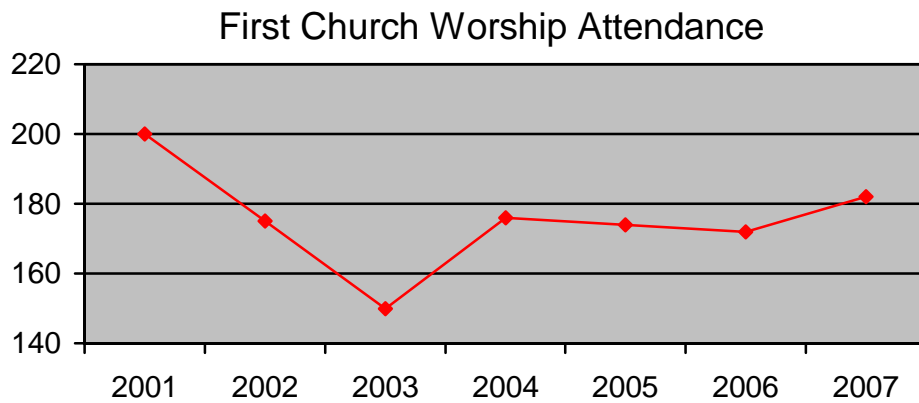


**Table 4.4. Average Worship Attendance Including Treatment Year**

First Church	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Worship attendance	200	175	150	176	174	172	182
% of change		-12.5	-14.3	+17.3	-1.14	-1.15	+5.8



**Figure 4.3. Comparison of First Church profiles.**



**Figure 4.4. Worship attendance from 2001-2007.**

One affirming result from the second church profile was to see our strength improved (+7 points) almost as much as the minimum factor (+10 points). Maybe that should not be such a surprise because empowering leadership was an integral part of the treatment the implementation team designed. A look at the overall profile reveals that the health of First Church while improving is still pushing the national median of 50 from the bottom side. Two new health factors moved up to the median or above to join the maximum factor as positive indicators of improvement. This category of qualities that rate above the median score now includes empowering leadership (with a score of 67 points), gift-oriented ministry (with a score of 54 points), and functional structures (with a score of 50 points). As noted earlier, inspiring worship was the only trait to decline, slipping back below the median to a score of 48.

The second church profile reported modest gains for passionate spirituality (+7 points) and holistic small groups (+6 points). The quality of loving relationships, only slightly raised, is now tied with need-oriented evangelism as the minimum factor, both with a score of 42. Both of these low factors will be addressed in our plan for going forward with improvements.

### **Summary**

The ministry intervention steps designed by the NCD team were part of a fluid process. They went into motion at the beginning of the year but adjustments were made throughout the year as needed. The new energy created among leaders as they saw the Holy Spirit at work was truly a blessing to me. Periodically, a lay leader would comment on the healing and refreshment visible in the lives of members of First Church.

Not all benefits of NCD as an intervention tool can be quantified as a score, rating, or number. Some quality improvements are reflected in participant responses reported below. I am not sure my members would attribute the positive reflections of the past year to anything directly related to this NCD process, but the second survey did provide a time and place by which these insights were collected. I also want to include a personal assessment at this point. I experienced many obstacles during this past year and glitches along the way. The NCD church profile helped to keep me focused when distractions and difficulties presented themselves. This sense of biblical focus was very valuable when I felt overwhelmed in the midst of staff changes, local road construction, severe winter weather, and weeks where I felt like I was not making any progress. The help in establishing personal focus and identifying the growing edge for new ministry with NCD was invaluable to me.

### **Other Variables Impacting this Study**

The context of a local church needs to be factored into the discussion of profile results because any number of issues could have affected the previously reported data. Allowance was made for the presence of confounding variables by asking *Research Question #3: What confounding variables have potentially impacted the observed changes in this church's health and growth?* The responses gathered by the debriefing questions for the thirty participants did not yield the type of information I was expecting (see Appendix D). Because all but one participant perceived the health of the church to be stable or improving, the majority of comments were related to factors respondents saw as positive changes to our local church context. To be honest, I saw contextual factors during this last year that probably kept the church from seeing a more dramatic gain in

quality index and average worship attendance. Improvement occurred in both areas, but only by modest dimensions. I discuss these negative factors further in the following section.

### **Positive Factors and Reflections**

This summary comes from responses on debriefing forms. These answers were from individuals that perceived the church's health had improved in the past year. Nine responses cited the presence of a new pastor as a positive factor for change. Two responses listed improved communication and current openness to new ideas as positive factors. Four responses mentioned the dynamic of new leaders or leaders who are united behind positive changes as factors in the current trend. Three responses named additional small groups and increasing participation in groups as positive factors. One response saw more options for congregational involvement and fellowship as an important factor. Two responses named our improving finances as a factor responsible for better attitudes.

All of these factors come together in helpful ways when looking for causes of the improving church context. Their presence does not need to be discounted in any way nor do they diminish the data presented, but I think these factors confirm that the effects of improved health can be felt by the participants themselves.

### **Negative Factors and Reflections**

As I approach the close of this chapter, I do not want to diminish the results that have been reported so far, but a number of factors seemed to work against us during the year of treatment. My main task was keeping the process moving and keeping leaders on target. At times I saw the whole church bogging down in the chaos of too much change. The following factors contributed to the majority of that chaos.

**Staff changes.** The year began with two staff people missing. My custodian retired at the end of January, and I dismissed the church secretary the day before the winter retreat. The dismissal resulted from her unwillingness to accept revisions in her job description. The signing of the new job description just happened to coincide with date of the planning retreat. The negative emotions left over from that termination created somewhat of a distraction the next day. My paid ministry staff consists of one full-time secretary, a half-time youth director, one half-time custodian, two part-time music directors, and an organist. This change in team dynamics disrupted my progress at the beginning of the project year but at the same time, I felt free from the growing negativity of my previous secretary.

I shifted some of my energy to the task of enlisting temporary office help, seeking qualified secretarial candidates, and arranging the interview process. Without a secretary for six weeks, everything in the office effectively ground to a halt until the new person could be hired and trained. The new secretary provided a much needed boost of fresh energy, but the ministry initiatives discussed at the winter leadership retreat sat on my desk until March. Several meetings with the implementation team were required to get our strategic planning back on track. The ministry intervention detailed earlier in this chapter was not formally adopted by our Church Council until May.

**Road construction.** The main obstacle within our community this year was a road construction project that essentially closed the only road by which we can access church property. From July until October, anyone intent on finding our church was intercepted by a large orange sign that read, “road closed—no thru traffic.” I wish the sign could have been amended to read, “but you can still get to the United Methodist

Church.” Only one person mentioned the road construction obstacle on the response form, but hampered road access was something with which I struggled for four months. In tracking visitors, I noticed that we had none during this period of time. We averaged about seven or eight new people a month for the rest of the year. Average worship attendance during the first five months of 2007 was 191 per week. The average for the second half of the year was only 172 per week.

**Elderly congregation.** One respondent named the factor of age in understanding our context. We are mostly an elderly congregation. The age factor compounded the effect of road construction and severe winter weather this year. Negotiating the road work was a daily hassle and the severe winter weather that followed the road reopening kept some people home. All five Sundays in Advent were hit by severe winter snow storms, further weakening worship attendance.

**Past history of conflict.** I encountered pain from the past in several instances when trying to recruit new leaders. Good people had been traumatized and still carried some reluctance to engage in leadership responsibility because of what had happened. I tried to trust that God was bringing healing, be patient, and keep the process moving.

### **Demographic Changes**

The Maquoketa community has been very stable, experiencing only a slight 2 percent population increase over the last ten years. The population remains steady at about 6,100 residents. In the year of treatment, eighteen families were welcomed to the community by the Chamber of Commerce Welcome Wagon, but these gains mostly replaced families that had moved away the previous year (Driscoll).

When I talked with Stacy Driscoll, the Executive Director of Economic Development for Jackson County, she believed the economic climate of the local county was fairly strong. Enough growth and new economic development have occurred that the *Quad-City Business Journal* featured Maquoketa as its headline community recently. This regional publication noted positive strides in the current year such as a new Super Wal-Mart, the opening of a new YMCA, the passing of a \$6.6 million school bond issue to renovate the local high school, and a major addition for the fire station (Schorpp 4). The Family Dollar Regional Distribution Center is seven years old and still adding to its workforce, building towards the goal of employing five hundred people. Two years ago the community came together and established a Fine Arts Center with mostly volunteer labor. These positive markers are signs that optimistic attitudes are to be found here even though the county is the fifth poorest in the state.

### **Local Experience of the NCD Process**

Half of the participants in the questionnaire did not offer a comment to the request for input about their experience of the NCD process. Two people felt disconnected from the process because they missed seeing the results from the first profile. They were not on any leadership team where the results were discussed and missed other communication points during the year. One person thought the survey raised some larger ideas about future directions for the church but was undecided as to whether the risk to go in those new directions would be worth the effort.

The balance of responses was positive. Four people believed the NCD survey was thought provoking and gave good insight about what needed changing. Several participants appreciated the chance to focus in a positive direction and wanted to discuss

new programs instead of old problems. Others believed this process had moved us into action as a church. The profile provided some handles to which we can hold while striving to improve the health of our church. Finally, some liked having an objective profile upon which to base our annual goal setting and decision-making process.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

These are the main findings from the presentation of data in Chapter 4, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

- The NCD profile indicated improved levels of church health after our ministry strength was linked with the church's minimum factor and an appropriate ministry intervention was put into practice.
- This study also contains evidence that improved health was positively related to increased worship attendance at the First United Methodist Church of Maquoketa.
- The NCD improvement process enhanced the individuality of my church in discovering her unique God-given potential for ministry. The ministry intervention is tailor-made through the creative energy and spiritual insights of those involved in leadership at the local church level.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### **Conclusions from Major Findings**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of Natural Church Development as a tool for assessing health and stimulating renewal in the local church. Research from Natural Church Development was used to design and implement ministry changes for the First United Methodist Church of Maquoketa. The impact of this ministry intervention has been measured, revealing positive results, and I now come to the place to discuss further the conclusions that have been drawn.

#### **Value of NCD Verified**

The first conclusion drawn from the data reported in Chapter 4 relates to the value of NCD as a tool that promotes church health. I believe the NCD process provides more than simply an assessment tool to identify the weaknesses of a church. The initial church health questionnaire yielded data by which NCD then generated a profile charting the level of health in eight quality characteristics. I consider NCD the key that helped my leaders in forming an appropriate ministry intervention to address the ministry needs of this church. Leaders cannot plan and work towards health unless their attention is focused on needed improvements. I believe NCD gave us that critical element of focus. NCD also provided an objective way to measure improvement at the end of the yearlong test period. Each NCD church profile set the table for discussions that would occur among leaders in later strategic planning sessions.

The key to health in a local church, according to Schwarz, is to work towards the harmonious interaction of all eight quality characteristics (*Natural Church Development*

51). Because improving eight factors would be a fairly overwhelming task to tackle all at once, NCD helps a church focus and set priorities around the minimum factor. In this way, the church is positioned to receive the greatest long-range impact as the change process begins. The profile feedback we received after the first survey helped us identify our minimum factor. In the course of addressing our minimum, six out of seven of the other factors also improved. The process has been very encouraging and helpful to me as a local church pastor.

Having stated the positives, I do have to admit the NCD process can reflect a level of self-centeredness with its focus exclusively on the internal barometer of how things are going. While surveying members in leadership and those demonstrating active involvement, no input is received from those in the community to whom we would like to reach out. The danger with this method of data collection is that a church could become inward focused if not intentional about outreach. I found NCD easily adaptable when the desire to add a missional focus to ongoing ministry plans was discussed.

Another dynamic raised by Hunter et al. is the fact that NCD seems to be measuring perceptions rather than the real health levels of a congregation (106). As a result of my experience, I agree. The NCD survey is actually measuring the church health perceptions of those who participate in the survey. Perception, however, is still important and provides a valuable starting point.

### **Relationship between Health and Growth**

The second conclusion drawn from the data reported in Chapter 4 relates to the value of NCD as a tool that promotes church health and as a device that opens the door for the possibility of improved worship attendance as well. Schwarz admits that not every

healthy church will see numerical growth. In fact, improving worship attendance is not the ultimate goal, but sometimes simply a natural outcome of improving health in the church (*Natural Church Development* 42). The downward slide of attendance at First Church for the last several years was interrupted following the NCD ministry intervention in 2007. Worship attendance increased from 172 to 182; therefore, both the quantitative and qualitative findings lend credibility to the conclusion that the process of facing our weaknesses and rallying our strengths increased the vitality of First Church. This study reveals that the strategic effort put forth by this group of believers played a part in receiving God's blessing towards renewing the ministry of this church.

### **Church Uniqueness and Creativity**

The third conclusion drawn from Chapter 4 comes from my personal application of the NCD tools and materials. I had a very good experience while using this tool. NCD does not give a detailed prescription, a standard recipe, or a successful church model to be imitated—the profile names the direction of focus (the minimum factor) at which point the church will have to experience improvement if they wish to see growth. The minimum factor will vary from church to church, thereby requiring a different strategy or ministry intervention from church to church. Schwarz and Schalk have as a stated goal “to develop the individuality of each church” (8). NCD actually encourages creativity and stimulates the potential God has already bestowed to each faith community. NCD allows the church leadership to design the ministry intervention and contextualize the treatment so that it fits this church, at this time (Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* 104). I think that this contextualization step is a very significant strength of this process. Leaders are pushed to renew their connection with God, to enter a discernment process, to be

sensitive to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church, and to wrestle with designing a process towards the goal of improvement. NCD gives ample freedom, and yet enough structure, focus, and objective information in the profile to keep the church leaders on track. NCD is not the only tool that guides this type of church improvement process, but the stated goal of this study was to determine whether NCD is effective in what it promises. Again, I think NCD was an effective tool for improving our church.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

I cannot prove the cause-and-effect link between NCD and the improvement experienced by my church, but I do see the church in a more positive place than it was last year. The self-reported quality improvements are obvious even beyond the eight factors of the church profile. Morale is up and attitudes are positive. The data available outside of our church profile shows gains as well. Giving is improving and average attendance has increased. These are solid numbers. As a new pastor, the main advantage NCD gave me is focus. Of all the things needing attention when I arrived, our church profile helped me decide what to do first.

### **Evaluation and Interpretation of Findings**

The findings of my research build upon the results of past dissertation work. In the methodology of my project I added random selection for the selection of participants. This feature was not used in previous dissertations using NCD. The strategic NCD intervention applied to my ministry situation did indeed bring improvement in quality and quantity. All but one dissertation cited found the same results for the churches involved in their research (Borden 114).

### **Connections between Findings and Literature Review**

Chapter 3 raised the possible dynamic of the presence of a placebo effect. At times I wonder if my presence as a new pastor has produced just such an outcome. The recent trauma of ongoing conflict has all but disappeared. Perhaps church members are feeling better about their faith community and rated the quality characteristics higher based on their growing trust in my leadership. I wonder if the church is really improving or if the belief that things are improving drove the increased ratings. Their sense of optimism combined with my newness might have functioned as a placebo. This combination often provides an initial boost in morale. After that boost fades, working together towards deliberate change and improvement becomes more difficult.

Chapter 3 raised the additional possibility that my findings could have been influenced by the Rosenthal Effect (“2001 James McKeen Cattell”). I cannot dismiss the likelihood that my positive expectations and the intervention would work. This effect may have influenced participant perceptions of the treatment process. Actually, I did all I could to build momentum towards positive change and improved health as is the function of a change agent. I do not think my effort alone brought the increased ratings.

Chapter 2 recalled the small group strategy Wesley employed for the tide of Christian renewal that birthed the Methodist Church. I found the small group to be an integral part of our ministry intervention. I think the small group setting is the key to growing a healthy church. In fact, among all the quality characteristics listed by NCD, Schwarz himself points to the primacy of healthy small groups in fostering church vitality. Wesley was also a master in targeting the felt needs of his generation and funneling passion and energy towards Christian action to meet those needs. I feel God

calling me to encourage my church to plan ministry that includes and reaches out to the least, the last, and the lost just as Wesley did in his day.

### **Connections between Findings and Theological Foundation**

This dissertation is grounded in a theology of renewal using two biblical metaphors of hope: the stump and the shoot from the writings of Isaiah and new wine poured into new wineskins from a parable of Jesus. I want to make some practical connections between my findings and these metaphors from Scripture. The first NCD church profile, in essence, gave the condition of the stump. The ministry intervention designed ways to stir new life and encourage the development of new shoots. The second church profile measured any growth. The task for current leaders is to prune these new shoots, add fertilizer to the mix, and continue to protect and nurture the growth as it comes. Our next ministry intervention will need to include designing new wineskins to catch or contain new wine. I pray the Holy Spirit will begin to pour this new wine into the life of our congregation. If this new wine is realized in the form of new people, the new wineskins may very well be new small groups and fellowship gatherings.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The NCD profile is developed for a church on a computer tabulated compilation of the answers of thirty participants. As noted earlier, the truthfulness of these results depends very much upon the accuracy of participant self-reported perceptions. This reality must be acknowledged as a factor possibly affecting the validity of my research.

Another limiting factor in the gathering of data is related to the elderly age of my congregants. NCD specs may have made the sample unrepresentative of the whole congregation by limiting the eligible population only to core leaders and active members.

This restriction serves to factor out all inactive and nominal believers but also excludes those inactives who were faithful for years and now cannot attend worship because of age and physical inability. Another segment that might get left out of this eligible population is that of the younger religious seeker. The perceptions of this person might be vastly different from the long-term member, but because he or she has not taken the step of membership, this perspective will not appear in the final results. Thus, some young and old persons connected with this congregation were factored out from the beginning.

### **Observations and Improvements for the Study**

One of the first things I would recommend doing differently is to engage the services of someone trained as an NCD coach. Adams made reference to the insights received from an assigned coach (128) at several points in her conclusions. I wish I had included the services of a trained coach as one of my resources. I certainly think the NCD process and survey instrument were very valuable in the research I was able to conduct.

I also wish I would have designed the data collection following the second NCD survey a little differently. The results from the open-ended research questions (#4 and #5) on the final exit poll were fairly brief. Other dissertations had done selective interviews to round out their data collection. I wanted to avoid the bias of handpicking interviewees but did not consider making a random selection for the purpose of doing interviews. I think I lost some of the information that an interviewer might have received with a set of follow-up questions. If responses were short, the question could have been reframed to invite the person to probe a little deeper. Almost half of the participants skipped the reflection questions at the end of my exit poll worksheet.

## **Recommendations**

Generalizations from the results of this study can only be made to the local congregation from which the population was drawn. The profiles used are representative of the First United Methodist Church in Maquoketa. The profile of other churches in my community and region will vary according to their needs and circumstances. NCD does not have a one-size-fits-all approach in designing a path towards improved health for a local church.

### **Applications for Ministry**

I do recommend Natural Church Development and believe this tool can be a benefit for other churches wishing to be vital stations of mission and ministry. I found NCD very valuable when I came to the step of designing our ministry intervention for the purpose of strengthening the ministry of my church. If the NCD profile reveals a similar minimum for another church, that church may find value in drawing ideas from components of the ministry intervention described here.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

In the course of my study additional research ideas surfaced. These factors were beyond the scope of my study but I list them for further research possibilities.

**Placebo effect.** Considerable time was given discussing the possible influence of the placebo effect in this study. I wonder if my newness functioned in this way. I think I enjoyed some help from the momentum that came with the project occurring during my ministry honeymoon. In that sense, my newness as a pastor could be counted as a confounding variable.



I would recommend two areas of additional study. First, further research could be done to eliminate influence the newness of a pastor might have upon the results of NCD. The impact of NCD could be measured in the period following a pastoral honeymoon. Second, a longitudinal study could be set up to come back at some time in the future to measure if the initial benefits of NCD are still helping a church strategize for improvement.

**Biblical exegesis.** I could see value in deepening the biblical exegesis under each of the health characteristics used by Natural Church Development. The NCD materials make brief scriptural connections to get our thinking started, but the richness of what the Bible has to offer in these eight areas is waiting to be explored further.

**Randomization.** I would suggest all future studies involving the NCD survey instrument include the random selection process in the design. Randomization adds validity to the results within the sphere of the body of related research.

**Methodology.** Another study may want to fine-tune this methodology, include the effect of having an NCD coach during the treatment, or allow different samples of church members to take the survey instead of trying to have the same people both times. Each dissertation surveyed that had at least a pretest/posttest design seemed to value having the same thirty participants for each survey. NCD directions do not seem to have such a requirement. Additional study could focus on the validity of having a different random sample drawn from the eligible population so that new people are participating at each point of testing.

**Tenure of pastoral leadership.** In some of my reading, the question of pastoral longevity was raised. As I conclude my writing, that question becomes more personal. I

would recommend a study looking into how long a pastor/leader needs to stay in a church to make a successful turnaround. This study might include a focus which finds ways to anchor significant change into the culture of the congregation so that a transition in pastoral leadership doesn't allow the church to switch back to its dysfunctional "default" mode.

**Reasons for failure.** Research could be focused around the reasons why some turnarounds continue strong and others fizzle after what appears to be an initial success.

**Church assessment tools.** NCD is not the only tool available for assessing the health or vitality of a church. The various instruments available could be compared.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The next steps I see for me and for my church will be to continue forward with the progress noted so far. I want to do more explanation and teaching about the eight qualities of church health. Not all of my people share the commitment to want to work towards improvement in every area. For example, one member voiced his concern that passionate spirituality is not necessarily a positive trait in the eyes of some. He has concerns about what passionate spirituality might look like in the United Methodist Church. He expressed reservations as to whether we should even work to grow the passion of members. I need to provide more education about the biblical support for these qualities and where the NCD process might help us as a church.

To build on the progress of this first year, our new NCD profile draws attention to two minimum factors—need-oriented evangelism and loving relationships. The leadership team will continue to implement the steps for improving the previous minimum factor, making some adjustments for ways to include the dynamics required to

improve our quality of loving relationships. Again, focus is the key, so we resist the temptation to tackle more than one or two quality health characteristics at a time.

I also plan to offer myself as an NCD coach to other churches as we continue forward into our own season of intentional change. The Iowa Annual Conference recently hired a Leadership Development Minister for the purpose of evangelism and new ministry. This person has announced plans to encourage the use of NCD as a way to revitalize the local church and assess where growth is needed. I am excited about the possibilities to share what I have learned with other pastors and churches in my region.

The motivation for this project came following a visit to my home church. The reality of their decline during the twenty years since I had graduated from college was shocking. We attended the Christmas Eve worship service, which, instead of overflowing with guests, relatives, and visitors, was sparsely attended and devoid of enthusiasm.

I have good news. A change in pastoral leadership has stimulated a season of renewal for my home church. The new pastor has also initiated the use of NCD and my parents report increasing attendance and new vitality. The possibility of renewal is even stirring among the small rural churches of Iowa. These signs of renewal from around the state reinforce my hope that the Spirit of God can do a good work among the believers that I have been appointed to shepherd.

APPENDIX A

Letter to Congregation about Coming NCD Survey



*First United Methodist Church*

1019 Wesley Drive  
Maquoketa, Iowa 52060



Dear Members of First UMC,

December 15, 2006

As members of this congregation, I want you to be aware of a church health questionnaire that will be taken on Sunday, January 7, 2007. The purpose of this survey is to assess the health of our congregation by measuring eight characteristics of church health. This project is the first part of the field research for my doctoral dissertation. Your input will be an important step in planning for our future as a church as well.

The questionnaire, developed by Christian Schwarz from his research of churches around the world, is limited to thirty participants. A selection team including Tom Petaros, Pam Hamilton, Lynn Disney, Brenda Ledford, and myself will be making the contacts for this study. The criteria for being selected, as outlined by the test instructions, are as follows:

1. There is a limit of 30 participants.
2. One person from any immediate family.
3. Members must be active in the life and ministry of the church, such as: involved in a ministry, Sunday school class, small group, or Bible study.

In receiving this letter, the selection team has determined that you are eligible to participate. I would like to stress the value I believe this study holds for the future of our church. If you are called and asked to participate, please consider saying yes. It would be best if you could be present at the church on January 7th over the lunch hour. The selection process will be done randomly. You will be contacted as to whether you are selected for this research project.

ChurchSmart Resources in Carol Stream, Illinois, will process our responses, and the Church Council will use the results for planning and visioning at a future retreat at the end of the month. The results will be shared with the congregation in future newsletters and at monthly meetings.

I would appreciate your continuing prayers for the ministry of our church as we enter a new year together.

In Christ,  
Rev. Jeffrey M. Dadisman

**APPENDIX B**

**Natural Church Development Survey**

A large, empty rectangular box with a double-line border, occupying the majority of the page. This box is intended for the content of the 'Natural Church Development Survey' mentioned in the title above it.











## APPENDIX C

### Leadership Retreat for Sharing Church Profile

Date: Saturday, January 27  
Place: St. John's United Methodist Church in Davenport, Iowa  
Time: 8:00 leave town  
5:00 return

#### Schedule:

8:00 Gathering and prayer, then leave for Davenport  
9:00 Team Building: mixer, game, music (Anne to lead)

9:45 break

10:00 Discussion: What does a healthy church look like? (small groups)  
What are the characteristics of a growing Christian?

Scripture—Mark 4:3-20 The Parable of the Sower  
What do growing churches do differently?

Explanation of 8 health characteristics (handout)

Reveal Church Profile—January 7 Questionnaire results  
Talk through responses and impressions  
Implications for us

#### **LUNCH—noon**

12:30 Team Building—**Homemade ice cream**  
Group Game

1:30 Tour of new ministry center at St. John's United Methodist Church

2:00 Developing Goals for 2007  
1. Reaching younger adults (named at Charge Conference)  
2. Improving communication (named at Charge Conference)  
**3. Brainstorming on the "minimum factor"**  
First steps—small groups to fill out worksheet from NCD  
NCD Implementation Team chosen

How to interpret next steps to the congregation?

3:30 Closing worship & communion  
Taking the next step—what will that step be for you?

4:00 Head for home

## APPENDIX D

### Debriefing Questions for Participants

December 2007

Jeffrey M. Dadisman  
First United Methodist Church

Please take a few moments to give some feedback about this experience. Your comments will be a valuable part of concluding my research. Please answer according to your personal understanding. Thank you for your time and commitment to this process.

**1. Circle the top 5 characteristics that describe a healthy church.**

Low levels of conflict	Empowered lay leadership	Loving relationships
Gift-oriented lay ministry	Contemporary music	Functional structures
Need-oriented evangelism	Balanced annual budget	Engaging worship
Inflow of new believers	Passionate spirituality	Healthy small groups
Missional outreach focus	Dynamic vision	Biblical preaching
Growing worship attendance		

**2. In light of what you have heard regarding church health in the last year, how would you rate our church's health at the time of the first questionnaire? (1 = not healthy, 10 = very healthy; circle one number)**

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

**3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate our church's health today? (1 = not healthy, 10 = very healthy)**

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

**4. Name other factors in the local context (church or community) that might account for changes in the church's health?**

**5. What was this survey process like for you personally? (the first test, the Leadership retreat—if you attended that event, the recommended program changes, the follow-up test today, etc.)**

What was helpful?

What was not?

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