

Equipping for ...

Natural Church Development

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Natural Church Development (NCD) is a paradigm—a model for understanding church health according to universal principles of health and a process for measuring the health of a congregation in order to improve its health.

At its core are two fundamental principles. First, only God can grow the church (I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 1 Corinthians 3:6) and second, every living thing, which God has created, has been created to grow **all by itself** if the conditions are suitable. Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.” (Mark 4:26-27). In other words, as leaders, our job is not to grow the church, rather we are to create the conditions that allow God’s growth to take place, **all by itself**.

In order for this to happen, we are first called to be balanced in our full experience and knowledge (from the Hebrew *jada*, “to know,” intimately) of the fullness of the Trinity. This is more than perceiving God differently according to each of the three dimensions of the Trinity; it is knowing and experiencing God in a threefold manner as



creator, redeemer and sanctifier. As Christians, not only are we expected to be balanced in the fullness of our experience of God, but further, we are called to grow in maturity. This call for balance is crucial as, typically, church growth programs invite us to find what we are good at and do more of that. Natural Church Development recognizes that this only makes us more unbalanced, while true balance involves discovering and exercising that which comes less naturally to us.



In order to identify our imbalance, an annual survey is conducted of the congregation. This is a standard survey with a standard number of participants (30) and it measures health according to eight principles. Principles are those factors that apply in all situations. For instance, all humans need good cholesterol, body mass and heart rate—these are principles of human health; they apply to everyone. The principles of congregational health are:

1. **Empowering Leadership.** Leaders who empower and unleash others to lead and serve the church.
2. **Gift Oriented Ministry.** We have all been given gifts for the building of the kingdom; identifying and nurturing these gifts can't help but grow the church.
3. **Passionate Spirituality.** We are each called to personal faith and are expected to nurture that faith through the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Scripture and experiencing God's work.
4. **Effective Structures.** This is not about finding the "right" structure. Many churches (and denominations) have different structures. Natural Church Development asks whether our structures work to move the church forward.
5. **Inspiring Worship Services.** Once again, this is not about the "right" style of worship but about the depth and meaningfulness of any type of worship.
6. **Holistic Small Groups.** Whether we have intentional small group ministries or not, our congregations are full of small groups, and all (even committees!) are expected to build community.
7. **Need-Oriented Evangelism.** Here, the need specifically refers to the need of the person being evangelized and not the organization doing the evangelizing.
8. **Loving Relationships.** Friendliness is not enough. There has to be depth to our relationships as Christians.

What Natural Church Development does is measure these eight characteristics and, in their understanding and application, allows congregational leaders to make decisions about improving the health of their congregations.

New Church Development is not a quick fix or a "one time" process. It is designed to be an annual process that measures health by asking (through the survey) the question, "**What is God already doing in our congregation?**"

As a process (and like a physical examination), Natural Church Development does not tell you why your church is the way it is, or what to do about it. However, there are many resources to help congregations proceed through the process. These include books, coaches and cycle starters (first steps to change). As well, the process itself gives congregations a language to describe their situations—a language that enables us to get clarity about the real issues we are facing.

As a minister, Natural Church Development is one of the few resources I wish I had known about sooner. It was invented by Christian Schwarz, a Lutheran minister and sociologist who lives in Germany. NCD's roots go back to 1989 and work with 1,000 congregations in 32 countries. It is now in use by over 65,000 churches in 72 countries. In Canada, there have been about 3,500 surveys administered in about 37 denominations. In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 149 congregations have engaged this process. The cost for the survey is currently set at \$400 plus tax, with a slight discount for second and subsequent surveys. In terms of insight and knowledge, it is extremely good value for money.

To learn more about Natural Church Development, feel free to contact me or NCD Canada directly. As well, print resources are available from The Book Room, 50 Wynford Dr., Toronto, Ontario M5S 2E6

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Christian Schwarz, 2005
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