



growing healthy churches

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Defining Church Health and Growth

The following paper gives a working definition of health and growth as applied to consultancy offered to the Baptist churches of New Zealand



Vision Statement agreed to at the Baptist Assembly 2000...

Vision Definition:	The Baptist Union exists to empower and resource churches for Health & Growth.
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Health Definition:	A healthy church is one that glorifies God through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear purpose & direction • Empowering leadership • Authentic worship • Dynamic community • Engaging spiritual formation • Willing service • Effective witness
Growth Definition:	Indicated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average attendance's • Baptisms • Number in youth/ children ministry • Number of members • Number in small groups • Church income • New Ministry initiatives

Health

The question of health involves many parts integrated together. There is no one formula to create health or description that covers the breadth of health, because local churches and denominational consultancy are working within complementary but different spheres.

The following statements all apply:

Healthy churches will generally be growing churches.

You can have a growing church that isn't healthy.

When one part of the church is unhealthy it affects all the rest.

Health includes growth because that is both a natural created outcome and the command of Jesus.

Churches need to be both faithful and fruitful

Consultancy assists churches to become healthy and growing through analysis, advice, training and models of operation, but only the local church can be a healthy, growing community.

What we can identify are indicators of health in the local church such as the following from 'The Gospel and Our Culture Network ' as quoted by Eddie Gibbs in Church Next pg. 56...

1. It is a church that proclaims the gospel.
2. It is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.
3. The Bible is normative in the life of the church.
4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death and resurrection of its Lord.
5. The church seeks to discern God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all its members.
6. Christians behave Christianly toward one another.
7. The church is a community that practices reconciliation.
8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love.
9. The church practices hospitality.

10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.
11. The church is a community that has a vital public witness.
12. There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.

Growth

God's mission calls and sends the church of Jesus Christ to be a missionary church in its own society and in the cultures in which it finds itself. Mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation. Mission means "sending", and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God's action in human history.

Against a background of decline in church attendance in England, a small group of churches that have experienced growth against the prevailing trend revealed several common features. (Church Next – Eddie Gibbs pg.57)

1. A strong, high quality leadership.
2. A clear missiological shape to their ministry.
3. A high level of involvement from skilled lay-workers.
4. The existence of effective links with their surrounding community.
5. An approach to evangelism centred on people and their needs.
6. A willingness to embrace change and manage it skilfully.
7. Well-planned worship services that are attractive and accessible to people.
8. Good deployment of small groups within the life of the church.
9. An excellent standard of work among children and young people.
10. A lack of complacency among a large proportion of members.
11. They are churches their members enjoy attending.
12. A conviction that their growth is a direct consequence of divine activity.

From his studies in the New Zealand context Kevin Ward identifies eight characteristics for a church to be 'successful' (article – 'Rethinking church to New Zealand', as published in Reality Magazine #45 June/July 2001)

1. A missionary congregation
2. A relational community
3. A transforming community
4. Highly participatory
5. Team leadership
6. Diversity and options
7. A sense of Transcendence
8. Cultural relevance

Growth can be defined and measured, but there is no one simple formula by which it can be guaranteed. The main focus of growth in the 'Growing Healthy Churches' mission is to make new disciples of Jesus Christ.

Some of the indicators of growth include:

First time commitments to Christ

Baptisms

Groups

Ministries

Average attendances

Natural Church Development seeks to put both health and growth together in its identification of eight quality characteristics which when implemented well will release the ability of the church to grow...

Empowering leadership

Inspiring worship service

Gift oriented ministry

Holistic small groups

Passionate spirituality

Need oriented evangelism

Functional structures

Loving relationships

