

Natural Church Development

What is Natural Church Development?

Natural Church Development (NCD) is a research based system of understanding congregational life that correlates healthy congregational life with congregational growth. Originating in Germany and developed as a global model, NCD has now become well accepted by many within the United States with over 12,000 congregations from various denominations now having used the tool.

NCD studied congregations around the world in a variety of contexts. The goal was to discern common areas of congregational life that crossed all racial, ethnic and contextual lines. In addition, the hope was that how congregations functioned in these areas could be correlated to effective outreach and congregational growth patterns.

The underlying paradigm is that the church is an organic entity and functions with a foundation of life giving and sustaining principles (referred to in NCD literature as “biotic” or “life-giving” principles). These principles are:

1. Multi-usage – the best ministry can be used multiple times and multiple ways
2. Interdependence – a change in one part of the system will affect other parts
3. Multiplication – healthy ministry reproduces itself
4. Energy transfer – energy must be moved in a system to where it is most helpful
5. Symbiosis – the best solutions reinforce and support other things in the ministry
6. Functionality – everything has a function and is accountable to doing it

Using these life-giving practices allows the church body to function better and provide for increased ministry capacity.

In addition to the 6 biotic principles, the results of the research identified 8 common areas of congregational life. These 8 “quality characteristics” are:

1. *Holistic* small groups
2. *Empowering* leadership
3. *Loving* relationships
4. *Passionate* spirituality
5. *Inspiring* Worship
6. *Need-oriented* Evangelism
7. *Gifts Oriented* Ministry
8. *Functional* Structures

The key to these quality characteristics is the adjective (in italics in the list above). The noun identifies the arena of ministry but the adjective describes that aspect which makes the characteristic function in life-giving and capacity increasing ways.

Using an assessment tool that surveys the pastor and 30 key leaders and active members from the congregation, a profile is generated for each ministry being assessed. This profile is then compared with a profile curve that includes the other congregations from the same country. Congregations’ worship attendance can be correlated to improving the health of the 8 quality characteristics. Improving the lowest score (the “minimum factor”) increases the capacity of the system to do ministry.

Finally, it is important to remember that NCD is a tool to assess the health of ministry and gauge its capacity for growth. It is not a magic bullet but a tool.

Ten coaches have been trained and are coaching each other’s congregations now. You are invited to use this article as a way to introduce NCD to your leadership. Please contact Pastor Bruce Ewen with question or for further information. 609-660-2093 bruce.ewen@ecunet.org