

## **Developing Healthy Churches**

By Bob Young

Much has been written about healthy churches. One way to approach the topic of church health is to ask, “What things are essential for health?” That is, what things are so vital that a church cannot be healthy without them? As we develop the list, we must make sure we accurately describe the characteristics. For example, in the matter of physical health, one must distinguish exercise from being physically active. Physical fitness is different than physical health. One can be healthy and not be toned perfectly. Physical toning may help one do things with maximum excellence, but the same things can be done by others, just not as quickly. Likewise, in the church, one must distinguish the ideal from the essential.

What **MUST** the church be or know to be healthy? Sometimes church health and church growth are confused. It is possible for a growing person not to be healthy. It is possible for a healthy person not to be growing. With regard to the physical person, we may answer the question of health by noting various dimensions of health. But the church is seldom defined by such health “segments”—physical, emotional, spiritual, emotional, financial, etc. Allow me to suggest a different list of health dimensions from an outline that I use in seminars and classes on the topic of “Church Health”.

### **Healthy Churches have a vision which is focused through their purpose and mission**

Healthy churches know and understand their purpose. That purpose is what drives their shared life. That is, healthy churches have a clear sense of their mission, and that mission is defined biblically and contextually.

- Healthy churches do more than just keep house, doing what they have always done
- Healthy churches seek to address the contemporary crises of modern evangelism, developing ways to take the gospel to an increasingly secular world
- Healthy churches are interested in and intentional about reaching the next generation
- Healthy churches are able to correlate the biblical and contextual definitions of mission in order to provide both friction and traction in outreach
- Healthy churches are aware of and willing to address issues for the church that either contribute to or distract from their purpose and mission

### **Healthy Churches match their goals and their methods to their biblical purpose**

Healthy churches have the ability to understand how the cultural context and their purpose intersect to develop methods that can provide bridges to the ministry setting. These bridges are capable of bringing the message of God into both the receptive and non-receptive sections of the surrounding culture.

- Healthy Churches are culturally and contextually aware. Healthy churches seek to understand why people do and do not attend church in our culture. The answers to the questions inform both goals and methods.
- Healthy churches are aware of emerging societal expectations, balancing their ministries with one eye on the consumer desires for market-driven churches and the other on their biblical purpose
- Healthy churches are sensitive in choosing effective methods for communicating the message
- Healthy churches are intentional in choosing ministry methods. Being intentional is a matter of style, it is reflected in the methods used, what is sometimes described as “how we do church”.
- Healthy churches determine what they are supposed to do and can do; they do it on purpose, not accidentally

### **Healthy Churches have healthy leadership structures**

Biblical leadership empowers the members. Biblical leaders are able to help develop others because they are secure in their own roles. Biblical elders edify, equip, and empower. Healthy leaders provide structures that encourage ministry by the followers.

- Healthy churches have healthy leaders

- Healthy churches are aware of the sociological changes that are influencing modern leadership concepts
- Healthy churches have leaders who lead thoughtfully and knowledgeably, and are willing to help the church change and transition in a changing world
- Healthy churches have leaders who are aware theologically and biblically as they seek to help the church grow and develop
- Healthy churches have leaders who understand the unique dynamics of Christian leadership and can effectively address certain leadership myths

### **Healthy Churches have healthy relational structures**

Healthy churches bring individuals together for ministry. Members are encouraged to participate according to their abilities and gifts. Healthy churches use the synergy of the body to accomplish more than individual members can accomplish. The relationships in healthy churches are spiritually-based and holistic in nature.

- Healthy churches have intentional activities that develop relationships and fellowship in the body of Christ
- Healthy churches purposefully develop relationships with potential members and the unchurched
- Healthy churches provide multiple opportunities for meaningful fellowship in a context which balances vulnerability and support
- Healthy churches plan for spiritual formation which helps people become like Jesus
- Healthy churches use discipleship and spiritual formation small groups as a part of their strategic ministry

### **Healthy Churches Build Healthy and Strategic Ministries**

Healthy churches minister intentionally according to the needs of the community and the abilities of the members.

- Healthy churches build ministries that purposefully address some of the traditional “diseases” that can afflict the church
- Healthy churches build ministries that contribute to maintaining the “vital signs” essential to church health
- Healthy churches address the need for constant renewal through rethinking and renewing ministries for effectiveness regularly

### **Healthy Churches are involved in church planting, strengthening, and development locally and around the world**

Healthy churches are involved in the global search for disciples.

- Healthy churches reproduce themselves
- Healthy churches understand and are focused on the need for church planting
- Healthy churches develop effective planting methods
- Healthy churches understand the characteristics of young, growing churches

### **Healthy churches operate with both the present and the future in view**

What will your church look like in 10 years? In 25 years?