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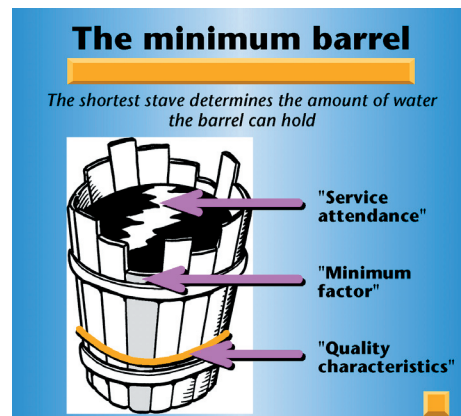
# Natural Church Development

*An Introduction for Church Leaders*



NCD equips church leaders to —

- Accurately assess church health
- Refine vision, goals and strategies
- Revisit essential values
- Focus resources appropriately
- Produce lasting health and growth



*“Giving priority to **quality**  
to help develop  
healthy growing churches”*

## Welcome

Welcome to this introduction to Natural Church Development, commonly known as NCD. We hope that this paper stimulates your thinking about church health and growth in a new way and sharpens your focus on the real issues confronting the growth of the church or churches for which you are responsible.

This paper is designed to provide you with basic information about NCD and how it might benefit you and your church as you seek to grow. On the following pages you will find information about:

- The basic concepts of NCD
- The process of implementing NCD
- The commitment required to gain the most value from NCD
- The next steps to take if you decide to do the NCD survey

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact ChurchSmart Resources at (800) 253-4276.

You may also wish to visit our website at [www.ChurchSmart.com](http://www.ChurchSmart.com)

Sincerely,

*Robert Rummel*  
ChurchSmart Resources

# What is Natural Church Development?

## A different way of thinking about growth

Natural Church Development is a **paradigm** — a way of thinking about church growth. Growth should be about quality (health) and not just quantity (numbers). In fact, NCD suggests that quality should take priority over quantity in church growth thinking.

At the heart of the paradigm is the Scriptural picture of the church as a living organism, not just an organization. Looking at the church “organically” gives us a different perspective on what growth means. The growth of organisms focuses on their health, their capacity to reproduce and how the individual body parts interact. They are grown, not built. They are nurtured, not assembled.

The NCD paradigm suggests that if church growth is about growing an organism, the health (quality) of the organism is going to have a direct impact on its size (quantity). If a church can become increasingly healthy over time, it is more likely and better able to reproduce disciples, ministries and eventually itself.

How many times have church leaders counted the numbers in Sunday services and wondered whether the church community was healthy and continuing to grow to maturity? Is size really a true measure of health?

The NCD paradigm helps you think about growing your church as a healthy living organism.

## A long-term process

Natural Church Development is also a long-term strategic **process** for progressively improving a church’s health. It is a process of continual improvement, not a program which guarantees “a healthy church” if implemented to the letter. Growing a church, like growing a plant, requires a long-term commitment which is intentional and consistent.

At the heart of the NCD process is a sophisticated diagnostic tool, the NCD survey, which complies with international statistical standards for validity and reliability. Annual surveys provide an accurate up-to-date “snapshot” of the health of the church on an ongoing basis. They are based on an assessment by key people within the life of the church. Each survey enables the church leadership to assess changes in the church’s health over the previous year and focus on the area needing greatest attention for the coming year.

This survey tool is what sets NCD apart from the many other useful models on the market. Most models have no way of measuring their progress. When people read NCD, they intuitively feel in their hearts that this is what the church should be (as they feel with many other programs/books on the Christian market), but now there is a tool to measure the church’s progress. These annual check-ups are critical to the success of NCD.

## Why Church Leaders Find NCD Helpful

Natural Church Development liberates leaders wrestling with growth issues:

- It reminds them that *God brings the growth* and it is their role to partner with Him, not generate the growth themselves.
- It helps them focus on *principles not programs*.
- It provides a *regular accurate “snapshot”* of a church’s health.
- It outlines a *process for improving quality*.
- It helps leaders focus on *essential growth values*.
- It provides concrete input for *developing or refining vision*.
- It helps *direct limited resources* effectively.
- It *confirms long-held beliefs* through the extensive international research. The following comment is common: “Christian Schwarz affirms what I have been thinking for a long time, but until now nobody has done the research.”

## What NCD is Not

- NCD is not a prescriptive “silver bullet” program guaranteeing church growth.
- NCD is not a substitute for spiritual leadership motivated to achieve healthy growth.
- NCD is not a substitute for the unique vision that God has for each church. Every church leader must seek the Lord for that vision. NCD will, however, undergird, clarify and stimulate that vision.
- NCD does not bring unity where there is division. The survey is most suited to churches with members united and committed to the ongoing life and health of the church.
- NCD is not a short-term solution. Deciding to “try NCD this year” will miss the riches of exploring the paradigm.

## Thinking Growth ... Naturally

### Partnering with God to stimulate healthy growth

Jesus gives a picture of the partnership God expects to have with His people in growing the Kingdom. In the parable of the growing seed, Jesus said:

*“This is what the Kingdom of God is like. A farmer scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know why. **All by itself** the soil produces grain — first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.” (Mark 4: 26-29)*

In this parable, Jesus shows Kingdom growth is a cooperative effort:

- the **sower creates an environment** which maximizes the potential for new life and growth by consistently removing the obstacles to healthy growth.
- but **God alone brings that life and growth** (which appears to happen “all by itself” to the farmer).

The role of church leaders and God’s people is similar to that of the farmer. They cannot give life and produce growth. Only God can do that. All they can do is maximize the potential for growth. This is done by a continual process of identifying and removing the barriers which impede growth within the life of the church. In this way the potential for “all by itself” growth is constantly maximized.

### Eight Quality Characteristics

The international research project revealed a framework of eight quality characteristics that were operating in healthy, growing churches. All were present and none could be missing. They were:

- **Empowering** leadership
- **Gift-based** ministry
- **Passionate** spirituality
- **Effective** structures
- **Inspiring** worship service
- **Holistic** small groups
- **Need-oriented** evangelism
- **Loving** relationships

One of the unique features of NCD is that the survey measures the church’s health in terms of the quality characteristics’ adjectives, not the nouns.

For example, every church has leadership. NCD wants to know to what degree is that leadership “empowering.”

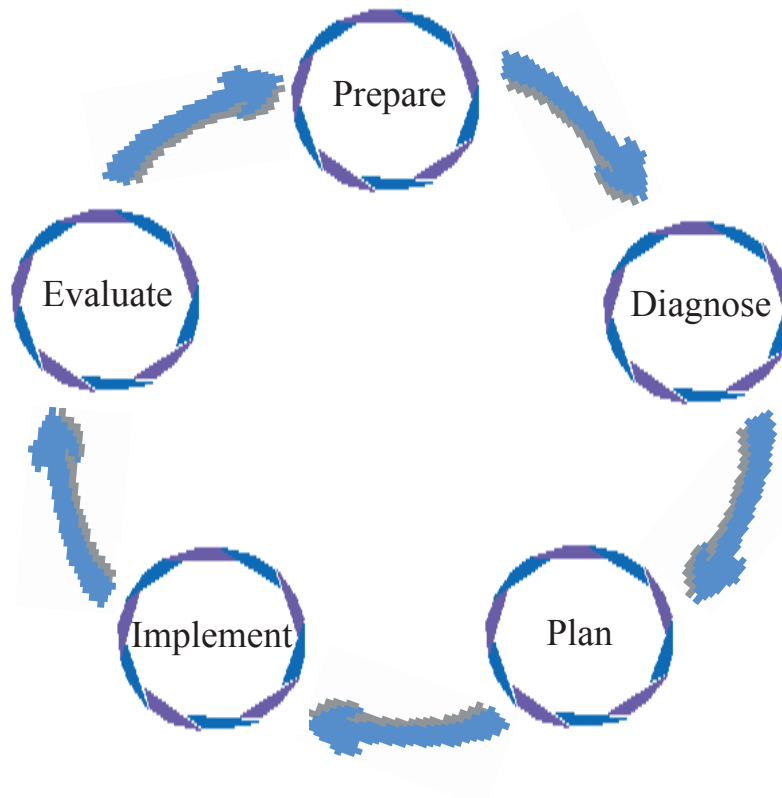
The adjectives are vital because they represent essential values for healthy growth. For NCD to be of maximum benefit to a church, its leaders must own these adjectives as values themselves and actively seek to incorporate them into the life of the church.

### The Minimum Factor

The basic strategy to improve the health of the church is simplicity itself — work at improving the health of the quality characteristic that is least developed. Christian Schwarz calls this the “minimum factor.” We like to refer to it as the point of maximum leverage, that area by which focusing your energy, gives the greatest return for your effort.

## The Quality Growth Cycle

The Quality Growth Cycle is a strategic process. It provides a framework for action which allows church leaders to get the most out of their annual survey and, at the same time, progressively understand and apply the NCD paradigm.



### **Prepare for the NCD survey**

The church leadership begins to understand the basic concepts of NCD and determines if it wishes to begin the process of doing an annual survey. It commits to a long-term implementation process to maximize the possibility of making the transition to NCD thinking and practice. It determines what assistance will be required from inside and outside the church to go through the cycle. Spiritual momentum is built by sharing NCD concepts with the congregation.

### **Diagnose — Do the survey and analyze the results**

The church spends time discussing the results of the profile. The purpose is to gain insights into the key obstacles that are preventing the healthy growth of the Minimum Factor. Feedback is sought from leadership, from those who completed the questionnaires and from those parts of the congregation most directly affected by the Minimum Factor. By the end of this stage, the leadership has a prioritized list of the key issues to be addressed over the period of time leading up to the next survey.

## **Plan**

The church puts together an action plan aimed at removing the obstacles to growth uncovered in the previous stage. In this way the health of the Minimum Factor will rise. Specific goals are set, with accountabilities. The goals are formulated using the Growth Forces so that new patterns of thinking begin to evolve through practical action. Ownership of the plan by the leadership is vital.

## **Implement the action plan**

At its heart, this step tests the commitment to the plan. Momentum is monitored and encouraged, people are held accountable for implementing their part of the plan, adjustments are made to the plan where necessary and progress is assessed regularly. Further work is done to understand the NCD paradigm and as a result the church begins operating more as an organism than merely as an organization.

## **Evaluate — Review the cycle and repeat the survey**

After twelve months, the leadership reviews the current cycle to assess what has been achieved in addressing the Minimum Factor. The survey is then repeated to test that assessment. The overall health of the church is determined and the new Minimum Factor revealed. The leadership consolidates the gains of the previous cycle and then turns its attention to the new Minimum Factor by beginning the next cycle.

## Yes to the Survey — Next Steps

If you want to do a survey in your church, you can start whenever you like. There are some things to consider as you get underway:

### Are the basic NCD concepts understood?

Make sure you and your leaders have a good understanding of the basic NCD concepts. We recommend that you study *Natural Church Development* and the *Threefold Art of Experiencing God*. You may also want to get a copy of the *ABC's of NCD* for each survey participant. These resources are available through ChurchSmart Resources. Feel free to call us at 1.800.253.4276 or order from our website: [www.ChurchSmart.com](http://www.ChurchSmart.com).

### Leadership commitment

You and your leaders must be committed to implementing NCD over the long term if the potential of NCD is to be released in your church. This means commitment to:

- The concept of NCD as a process (not a program) which brings continual improvement in the health of the church over the long term.
- Giving priority to the issues raised in each cycle and helping each other maintain momentum.
- Growing in your understanding of NCD, in particular the quality characteristics and the growth forces.
- Holding each other accountable on the NCD values.

It is through a long term, steady approach that the paradigm is taught, experienced and reinforced. It is not necessary to understand everything about NCD before doing the first survey, but the church will reap few rewards if the leadership begins only with the idea of “giving it a go to see what happens.” Sustainable, healthy growth takes time.

### Build momentum for change

Although most people respond with some excitement to the questionnaires themselves, the survey process alone does not generate momentum for change. In the lead-up time to doing the survey, you may want to build some momentum for change within the church using the principles and concepts of NCD. Different leaders do this in different ways. Following are some suggestions:

- Preach on the eight quality characteristics without necessarily mentioning them by name.
- Distribute copies of the *ABC's of NCD* to various groups so that the church can begin discussing what it means to grow increasingly healthy.
- Spend time discussing the quality characteristic *adjectives* as growth values to be lived out in the church.
- Use elements of the NCD paradigm to reinforce or re-shape the church's vision.

### Ordering the Survey

The survey comes with 30 questionnaires for key lay people and one for the pastor. The price of the survey is \$195, which includes the surveys, the scoring and a copy of the *Implementation Guide to NCD* (sent with the results). You can order this from:

ChurchSmart Resources  
Phone: 1.800.253.4276  
email: [orders@churchsmart.com](mailto:orders@churchsmart.com)  
web: [www.ChurchSmart.com](http://www.ChurchSmart.com)