



Natural Church Development

An Introduction

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 introductory booklet on Natural Church Development, commonly known internationally as NCD. We hope it 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 have responsibility.

The booklet is designed to provide you with basic information about Natural Church Development to help you decide 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 benefits to you and your church of engaging in the NCD process
- the next steps to take if you decide to do the NCD Survey

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the person who provided you with this booklet or contact your NCD national partner. You can log on to www.cundp.de/intercoach/index.htm to find your NCD national partner.



What is Natural Church Development?

A different way of thinking about growth

Natural Church Development (NCD) 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 (albeit a spiritual one). 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 then wondered whether the church community was healthy and continuing to grow toward 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 strategic 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 that, if implemented to the letter, guarantees "a healthy church." It requires a long-term commitment that is intentional and consistent.

At the heart of the 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 improvement in the church's health over the previous year and focus on the area needing the greatest attention in the coming year.



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 to generate the growth themselves.
- It helps them focus on ***principles, not programs***.
- It provides a ***regular and 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 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 every 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 healthy growth of the church.
- NCD is not a short-term solution. Deciding to "try NCD this year" will miss the riches of fully exploring the paradigm.



Thinking Growth.... Naturally

God's principles for growing living organisms

Scripture invites us to consider the principles by which God sustains and grows living things in the world He has created and sustains. These principles are used by God to grow His Kingdom as well.

Scripture teaches that the local church is also a living organism that God wants to grow – the Body of Christ. The local church shares similarities with other organisms God has created and sustains. Its potential for growth lies in its health, not its size.

NCD has shown through international research that healthy growing churches are more successful in releasing the potential for healthy growth because they apply these natural principles and treat the church more as a living organism to be grown rather than an organization to be built.

A fundamental part of the NCD paradigm is learning to see the church as a living organism to be grown through understanding and applying these principles.

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** that maximizes the potential for new life and growth
- but **God alone brings that life and growth** (which appears to happen "all by itself")

Natural Church Development
helps leaders create an ongoing environment that
releases the growth potential in their churches



Quality as the foundation for quantity

To truly think of the local church as a living organism is to acknowledge that quality (health) is just as important to church growth as quantity. In fact, quality is the essential foundation for quantity.

The health of any living organism directly impacts its capacity to grow and reproduce. The groundbreaking international research by the Institute for Natural Church Development International has shown a clear correlation between quality and quantity. Churches that focus on improving their health are more likely to grow numerically and reproduce ministries. Likewise, churches failing to heed the "health warning" are in decline.

Natural Church Development
helps leaders identify and address the
unique health (quality) issues facing their
churches

The Origins of Natural Church Development

Worldwide research

The Institute for Natural Church Development International, based in Germany under the leadership of Christian Schwarz, undertook worldwide research in the early 1990s.

1000 churches in 32 countries were surveyed to determine if there were principles producing healthy church growth independent of

- denomination or theology
- country or culture
- leadership style
- size
- ministry model

The key question was: *"What church growth principles are true, regardless of culture and theological persuasion?"*



The quality characteristics: a framework for healthy growth

The research 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-oriented* Ministry
- *Passionate* Spirituality
- *Functional* Structures
- *Inspiring* Worship Service
- *Holistic* Small Groups
- *Need-oriented* Evangelism
- *Loving* Relationships

The biotic principles: a foundation for thought and action

What distinguished these churches was not just a high degree of performance in the eight areas, but their application of a *core of natural principles* to church activity so that they operated more like organisms than spiritual organizations.

- *Interdependence* – all parts of the church are aware of the impact of what they do on other parts and ensure that the impact is positive.
- *Multiplication* – every part of the church is looking to reproduce itself.
- *Energy Transformation* – all the energy in the church is harnessed and directed towards achieving its God-given goals.
- *Multi-usage* – the church invests its resources in such a way that its various parts become self-sustaining, freeing up resources to be used elsewhere.
- *Symbiosis* – diverse parts of the church are encouraged to work together in synergistic "win-win" relationships.
- *Functionality* – all areas of the church are regularly assessed to ensure they are contributing to the overall healthy growth of the church as an organism.



The healthy churches may or may not have been aware that these principles were at work in the life of the church. They may have been implementing them intuitively. They may have called these principles by other names, or not named them at all, but they were nonetheless operating to a greater extent than in less healthy churches.

For church leadership, an essential element of NCD is learning to apply these principles so that they progressively become a natural way of life for the church.

The NCD Survey: Profiling the Local Church

A diagnostic tool for implementing the NCD paradigm

The international research discussed above was used as a foundation for developing the NCD Survey, which gives local churches an accurate, annual profile of their health, based on:

- internationally-validated, user-friendly questionnaires completed by the pastoral staff of the church and 30 key people (chosen according to specific criteria)
- a computer software program arising out of the original research program
- a standardization that measures the church against other churches nationally.

In essence the survey profile gives a rating for each quality characteristic, but also holds a wealth of information about:

- relative strengths and weaknesses of the quality characteristics
- the potential interrelationships between various quality characteristics ("Why is Holistic Small Groups high but Loving Relationships low?")
- the trends of different quality characteristics from profile to profile
- and most importantly, the Minimum Factor, which becomes the principal focus for discussion, analysis, strategic planning and action (see below).

A question of values

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

For example, the profile does not measure whether the leadership of the church is strong or visionary, but the degree to which it is empowering. The profile does not measure how much "ministry" is taking place in the church, but the degree to which people are using their spiritual gifts to do that ministry.

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 and actively seek to incorporate them into the life of the church.



The Minimum Factor

The basic strategy for improving 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 quality characteristic the Minimum Factor.

Since all eight quality characteristics are essential to healthy growth, it makes sense to work at addressing the lowest characteristic, that part of the body that is making the least contribution to its overall health and growth.

The overall strategy calls for progressively addressing each Minimum Factor as it arises through doing successive annual surveys. This method helps the leadership stay focused on what is important for healthy growth, set goals that will bring maximum health benefit, and direct resources more effectively.

The NCD Quality Growth Cycle

The Quality Growth Cycle is a strategic process that provides a framework for action that allows church leaders to get the most out of the annual surveys. At the same time, it helps them progressively understand and apply NCD principles.

Why a cycle?

There are several reasons why the Quality Growth Cycle is proving useful to church leaders:

- Many church leaders find it helpful to have the cycle's framework for implementation when applying growth principles.
- The cycle enables church leaders to respond to the Minimum Factor in a way that is unique to their church.
- The cycle fits into the annual church calendar, with its normal processes of review, visionizing, holidays, etc. This structure helps integrate NCD into the rest of church life.
- Repeating the cycle annually builds understanding of the paradigm progressively, reinforces values, maintains focus on what is important, and solidifies decision-making processes that increase the potential for "all by itself" growth.
- Repeating the cycle also reveals trends in church life and ultimately draws out deeper issues that may not be apparent in any one cycle.



Six major phases

The Quality Growth Cycle is a strategic process that is repeated every year as each survey is done to assess ongoing improvement in the church's health.

The six major phases are outlined briefly here. A more detailed look at the first phase is included later in this manual should you decide to do the survey.

Phase 1 - Prepare for the process

The church leadership begins to understand the basic concepts of NCD and determines if it wishes to do a survey in the church. It commits to a long-term implementation (multiple cycles) to maximize the possibility of making the transition to NCD thinking and practice. The leadership also 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.

Phase 2 - Do the survey

This phase involves selecting the thirty survey participants from within the congregation and then gathering them together to complete the questionnaires. The questionnaires are forwarded to an accredited NCD Coach who is assisting the church. A profile is then produced and returned to the church.

Phase 3 - Analyze the survey results

In this phase the church spends several weeks discussing the results of the profile. The purpose is to gain insights as to what is causing the Minimum Factor. Feedback is sought from leadership, from those who completed the questionnaires and from those parts of the congregation seen to be most directly affected by the Minimum Factor. By the end of this phase, the leadership is confident it has uncovered the major obstacles to growth in the area of the Minimum Factor.

Phase 4 – Establish goals and action plan

The church puts together an action plan that deals specifically with the issues uncovered in the previous phase. The goal is to remove the obstacles to healthy growth so that the health of the Minimum Factor area will rise. Specific goals are set with accountability in place. The goals are formulated using the Biotic Principles so new patterns of thinking begin to evolve through practical action. Ownership of the plan by the leadership is vital to its success.



Phase 5 - Implement and monitor progress

At its heart, this phase tests the commitment of the leadership 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.

Phase 6 – Evaluate and repeat the survey and the cycle

After twelve months, the leadership reviews the goals of the current cycle to assess what has been achieved in addressing the Minimum Factor and to evaluate the process as a whole. 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 a new cycle.

To Do an NCD Survey or Not?

Is a survey really necessary?

The survey is the only means of providing the leadership with an objective and accurate snapshot of the church's health. Experience has shown that the intuition of leadership is often misleading. Even church leaders who have been at the church a long time are sometimes surprised by the survey results. This is because the survey goes beyond the opinion of just a few people in the church or the opinions of outside consultants, no matter how valuable their insights may be.

NCD can help a leadership team focus on eight essential areas for growth without doing a survey. However, the survey goes the next step by highlighting annually the area of greatest importance for maintaining healthy growth.

Churches can work at implementing the NCD principles without doing the survey, and this is not discouraged. Yet the most gain is made when those principles are implemented within the context of raising the Minimum Factor.

Is a survey right for your church now?

Having said that, the survey is not suitable for every church at the time they are interested in doing it. Experience has shown that the following issues are important. These may not disqualify a church from doing a survey, but it is wise to discuss their implications with a NCD Coach.



Timing

It may not be an appropriate time to do the survey if, for example, the church is in the middle of rolling out a vision, launching significant new programs or building new facilities. On the other hand, it may be an appropriate time if the church is at a point of developing or reviewing a vision.

Commitment, unity and a heart for growth

NCD requires commitment for the long term. The survey will bring little benefit if the pastor and the rest of the leadership are not committed to understanding and implementing NCD.

A survey is unlikely to gain traction in an environment where there is disunity (especially among the leadership) or where the church has specific relational issues in the body it needs to deal with.

Although a survey does tend to generate excitement and focus, it works best where there is a genuine heart for growth in the congregation.

Comings and goings at the top

If the pastor is leaving in the next twelve months, it *may* not be appropriate to do the survey because of loss of momentum. Likewise a pastor who has just arrived should consider delaying doing a survey. This gives the opportunity to get through the honeymoon period, understand the church better and be able to exercise greater insight in selecting the people to complete the questionnaire.

Demographics, change and expectations

Are there any relevant contextual issues that are likely to impact growth potential? For instance, are there changing demographics and is the church reflecting those changes? Is the area facing changes in business, government infrastructure, industry, employment, etc.?

Other issues also affect the capacity of the church to change and grow. These may necessitate careful thought before embarking on an NCD Survey. For example, has the church plateaued or been in decline for the past 5 years? Are there more members in the 50 plus age bracket than below?



Recent church plant

It may not be the right time to do the survey if the church has been planted recently, although there is no hard and fast rule here. Is the church large enough to do a survey? Are the various functions and activities of the church stable enough to think an assessment can be made of the eight quality characteristics? Would a survey help or hinder the development of the vision? Would it be better at this time to focus on all eight Quality Characteristics rather than seek to isolate the Minimum Factor through the survey?

Size

A decision to do the survey may simply depend on the church's size. The computer software that generates the profile is optimized around questionnaires for pastoral staff and thirty people from the congregation, selected according to the following criteria:

- committed to the life of the church
- actively involved in ministry, preferably performing a regular task
- a member of a small group, cell or home group

If the church has less than 30 people and still wants to do a profile, **everyone in the church should complete a questionnaire if they fit the selection criteria.** A 100% sample will be accurate. It is not recommended for churches to take the profile if less than 15 people in the congregation fit the criteria. In the end, the leadership must feel confident that they have a representative sample to complete the questionnaire so there is confidence in the profile results.

Committed but not big enough yet?

If the church is not large enough to do a survey yet, work is being done to produce resources that will help the church begin to implement some key elements of the NCD paradigm based on the Quality Growth Cycle. These will provide a framework into which the survey can be inserted when the church's size makes it practicable.



Yes to the Survey – Next Steps

If you want to do a survey in your church, a number of important steps should be taken in preparation. An outline of Phase 1 of the Cycle follows.

Understand the basic concepts

Make sure you and your leaders have a good understanding of the basic NCD concepts. We recommend that you study *Natural Church Development*, the *ABCs of Natural Church Development* and *The Threefold Art of Experiencing God*, all by Christian Schwarz. Each of these books can be obtained through your NCD national partner.

The *ABCs* are usually sufficient for your leadership team and other interested parties in the church. The following discussions may help your team prepare for the survey:

- growth in quality (health) leading to growth in quantity
- church as a living organism to grow rather than a spiritual organization to build
- growth being achieved by removing obstacles to growth rather than trying to push growth
- the quality characteristic adjectives as values-- what that means and how they will be modeled in the life of the church by the leadership
- what the team believes are the church's strengths and weaknesses and why

Leadership commitment

You and your leaders must be committed to implementing NCD over the long term and must understand why you are making that commitment. You must be committed to:

- the concept of NCD as a process (not a program) that brings continual improvement in the health of the church over the long term.
- giving the issues raised in each cycle priority and helping each other maintain momentum.
- growing in your understanding of NCD, in particular the quality characteristics and the biotic principles.
- holding each other accountable for NCD values.



The paradigm is taught, experienced and reinforced through a cyclical approach. 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.

Know your NCD Coach

The NCD coach is the person who provides you with the survey materials and organizes for the profile to be produced. The coach's role is, as the name implies, to coach the church leadership through the cycle. It is not the coach's role to do the work for you or tell you what to do, but to help you come to understand the principles and practice of NCD – to walk the road with you. The leadership must take responsibility for understanding the principles and being intentional and consistent in applying them.

As part of the survey cost, the coach will help you prepare for the survey, administer it and start you on the process of analyzing the results. Whether this involves the coach coming to the church or being in touch by phone is a matter for discussion.

If you decide you want additional coaching support, you need to talk to the coach about what the church needs and how much it will cost. While we recommend working with a coach at least throughout the first cycle, it is not compulsory.

If you need to find an NCD coach, call your NCD national partner and they will endeavor to find one for you.

Build momentum for change

Although most people respond with some excitement to the questionnaires themselves, the survey process itself doesn't usually generate sufficient momentum for change. In the time prior to doing the survey, it is important to build some momentum for change within the church using the principles and concepts of NCD.

Different leaders do this in different ways. Here are some possibilities:

- Preach on the eight quality characteristics without necessarily mentioning them by name. Focus on issues of growth based on church health.
- Distribute copies of the *ABCs* booklet to various groups so that the broader church can discuss what it means to grow increasingly healthy.
- Reinforce or challenge current church values by spending time discussing the quality characteristic *adjectives* as growth values to be lived out in church life.
- Use elements of the NCD paradigm to reinforce or re-shape the church's vision.



Timings

Think about when you want to do the survey. It very much depends on the unique issues you face in your church. Here are some suggestions:

- Do the survey when you believe the leadership is united and understands the commitment involved in starting the NCD process.
- Take as much time as you need to prepare the congregation.
- Fit the survey in with significant times of annual review and planning. If, for example, you do your visionizing and planning in January, you may want to do the survey in October, allowing enough time to obtain the results and get congregational feedback before the holiday season. Alternatively, you may do the survey early in the year when people are fresh and enthusiastic.
- If your leadership positions are coming up for election, you may wish to delay the survey until the new leadership team is in place.
- If you have one or two major issues that need urgent attention, delay the survey until these issues are resolved and the survey can be given appropriate attention.
- Be sure the chosen date for the survey will not conflict with major events on the church's calendar that cannot be shifted.

Ordering the Survey

Having decided when you want to do the survey, you can order it through your NCD coach or through your NCD national partner if you do not have a coach.

We recommend that you check the website of your NCD national partner for the current price. If concerns are expressed in the church about this amount, it may help to explain that the cost represents about a weekly investment of _____ (you will need to calculate for your country), for which the church gains an accurate assessment of the church's health on an annual basis.

Included in the survey price are:

- a set of questionnaires along with instructions for selecting the 30 participants and completing the questionnaires.
- profile results with helpful materials, including *The Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development* by Christian Schwarz and Christoph Schalk.



- a manual that will take you through the steps of the Quality Growth Cycle in detail.
- the agreed-upon level of support from the NCD coach.

There are other NCD resources available. For details refer to the descriptions on the NCD national partner's website or log onto www.ncd-international.org to find the national publisher/distributor for your country. You will also find more resources on www.CoachNet.org.

Going on a journey

Natural Church Development is a journey toward lasting health in a church, which produces "all by itself" growth as described in the Parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29). In this journey, you learn the unique identity of your church as a living organism that God has equipped to grow. It is a journey of strengthening the strengths, but more importantly strengthening the weaknesses by consistently identifying and removing blockages to "all by itself" growth. As the church grows in health (quality), it is building the all-important foundation for an increase in size.

If you have any questions, contact the NCD Coach who provided you with this information (see below). Otherwise, contact Direction Ministry Resources.

NCD Coach:

Note: If you would like multiple copies of this document, you may obtain permission to reproduce it by contacting Direction Ministry Resources.

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