

CHURCH HEALTH—SEVEN FACTORS

By Bob Young

After a fellow minister and I shared a lengthy discussion of church health, I spent some time reflecting on my own ministry. Jan and I spent almost twenty years with two churches that experienced significant growth during our ministries. One more than doubled in eleven years; the other experienced a 50% growth in eight years. Were those churches healthy? Do unhealthy churches grow? Do churches grow because they are healthy?

I believe those churches grew because they were healthy, so I asked Jan to sit down with me and think about our experience in those churches. What are the indicators of church health? What characteristics made those churches vibrant? What internal dynamics enabled growth?

We identified seven factors—characteristics we identified in both of the churches mentioned above.

- First, the churches had a high sense of spiritual endeavor. This was evident in prayer, dependence on God, interdependence among God’s people, and shared spiritual lives.
- Second, the church assemblies were characterized by spirited, meaningful, uplifting worship which focused on God and united the church.
- Third, the churches had both a corporate and individual awareness of participating in the purpose of God. This was visible in organized personal evangelism programs, active outreach programs and activities, bus ministries, a purposeful focus on and involvement in mission efforts, and outreach to special groups (universities, shelters, prisons). The involvement and activities of the church reflected the spiritual, eternal purpose of God to save people. These activities said to the members and to visitors, “We are here for God and we are doing what God put us here to do.”
- Fourth, the churches had multiple connections with the community and world around them, and the members were willing and able to use those connections to the glory and purpose of God. This allowed the church to have a presence in government, medical care, schools, family events such as weddings and funerals, substance abuse prevention programs, jails and prisons, and many other places.
- Fifth, both churches had an accepting, joyful fellowship which was experienced through shared lives. The lives of the church members intersected frequently in contexts other than church activities. There were many planned shared activities. Both churches were committed to managing conflicts so that unmanaged conflicts did not distract or detract from the church.
- Sixth, both churches had a sense that God’s work is bigger than the local church, an awareness of something beyond the local congregation. This factor kept the churches from entering “maintenance mode.” This awareness was visible in participation in area church events, with Christian colleges, camps, and children’s homes, and in frequent church trips to assist with other works. In both cases, church leaders served on the boards of various para-church organizations.
- Finally, the churches had spiritually-minded leaders who were aware of the dynamics listed above and intentionally kept them in the minds of the members of the church. The leaders knew how to lead the church in reaching new heights in these areas.