



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 that 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 with 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 us at Direction Ministry Resources. You can phone us at (+61 7) 3869 0928 or email us at office@directionresources.com.au.

Our website has more information about Natural Church Development and its resources. You will find it at www.directionresources.com.au.

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Ian Campbell

Manager
Direction Ministry Resources
National Partner (South Pacific) for the
Institute for Natural Church Development International



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 organisation (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 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 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 which, if implemented to the letter, guarantees "a healthy church". It requires a long term commitment which 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 greatest attention for 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 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 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 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 which God wants to grow – the Body of Christ. The local church shares similarities with other organisms God has created and sustains. It's 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 organisation 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** which maximises 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 which
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 ground-breaking 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 organisations.

- ***Interdependence*** – all parts of the church are aware of the impact of what they do on other parts and ensuring that the impact is always 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 part of the "way of life" of the church.



The NCD Survey: Profiling the Local Church

A diagnostic tool for implementing the NCD paradigm

The international research was used as a foundation for developing the NCD Survey which gives local churches an accurate annual profile of their health. The Survey is 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 standardisation which measures the church against other churches in the local region (in our case Australia and New Zealand).

In essence the Survey profile gives a rating for each quality characteristic, but it 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 so-called "Minimum Factor", 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 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 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 which is making the least contribution to its overall health and growth.

The strategy is one of progressively addressing each Minimum Factor as it arises through doing successive Surveys. This helps the leadership stay focused on what is important for healthy growth, set goals which will bring maximum health benefit and direct resources effectively.



The NCD 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 the annual Surveys and at the same time progressively understand and apply the practicalities of the NCD paradigm.

Why a cycle?

There are many 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 which is unique to their church.
- The cycle fits into the annual church calendar, with its normal processes of review, visioning, holidays, etc. This helps integrate NCD into the rest of church life.
- Repeating the cycle annually progressively builds understanding of the paradigm, reinforces values, maintains focus on what is important and cements decision-making processes which 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 steps

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 steps are outlined briefly here. A more detailed look at the first step is included later in this manual should you decide to do the Survey.

Step 1 - Preparing for the NCD Church Survey

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 maximise 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.



Step 2 - Completing the Survey

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

Step 3 - Analysing the Survey Results

In this step 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. At the end of this step, the leadership is confident it has uncovered the major obstacles to growth in the area of the Minimum Factor.

Step 4 - Developing an Action Plan

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

Step 5 - Implementing the Action Plan

At its heart, this step 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 organisation.

Step 6 - Repeating 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. 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 a few people in the church or the opinions of outside consultants, no matter how valuable their insights.

NCD does help a leadership focus on eight essential areas for growth without a Survey being done. 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. However, most gain is made when the principles are implemented in 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 an accredited 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 is 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 to 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. 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 optimised 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

Profiles with less than thirty congregational participants may skew results. The software generates a result with as few as 20 people, but we recommend a minimum of 27. In the end, the leadership must feel confident that they have a representative sample to complete the questionnaire so that 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, there are a number of important steps you need to take in preparation. (What follows is an outline of Step 1 of the Cycle.)

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. (All can be obtained through Direction Ministry Resources).

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 organisation 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 role modelled 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 understand why they are making that commitment. They must be committed 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 the issues raised in each cycle priority and helping each other maintain momentum.
- growing in their understanding of NCD, in particular the quality characteristics and the biotic principles.
- holding each other accountable on the NCD values.



It is through the cyclical 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".

Know your NCD Coach

The NCD Coach is the person who provides you with the Survey materials and organises 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, do it and begin you on the process of analysing 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 throughout the first cycle (at least), it is not compulsory.

If you need to find an NCD Coach, call us at Direction Ministry Resources and we will endeavour to find one for you.

Build momentum for change

Although most people respond with some excitement to the questionnaires themselves, the survey process of itself doesn't usually generate momentum for change. In the lead up time 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 suggestions:

- 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 visioning and planning in January, you may want to do the Survey in October, giving 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.
- Will the chosen date for the Survey 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 Direction Ministry Resources if you do not have a coach.

Until 1 January 2002 the cost of the Survey is AUD\$264.00. We recommend that you check the Direction Ministry Resources website for the current price. If concerns are expressed in the church about this amount, it may help to explain that this represents about \$5.00 per week, for which the church gains an accurate assessment of the church's health on an annual basis.

Included in the Survey price is:

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



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

There are other NCD resources available. For details refer to the descriptions on the Direction Ministry Resources website. Select 'Resources', then the category 'Natural Church Development'.

Going on a journey

Natural Church Development is a journey to lasting health in a church which produces "all by itself" growth as foreshadowed 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 which God has equipped to grow. It is a journey of strengthening the strengths but more importantly strengthening the weaknesses by consistently identifying blockages to "all by itself" growth and removing them. As the church grows in health (quality) it is building the all important foundation for an increase in size.



Direction Ministry Resources

Direction Ministry Resources is an incorporated not-for-profit association based in Brisbane, Australia. Its purpose is to increase the effectiveness of Christian leaders by providing practical and productive resources.

As the National Partner in Australia, New Zealand and the islands of the South Pacific for the Institute for Natural Church Development International in Germany, Directions is responsible for:

- training and supporting a network of accredited NCD Coaches.
- supplying all available international NCD resources and developing additional local resources.
- working with churches, denominations and movements to apply the NCD paradigm effectively.
- liaising with the Institute in its ongoing research.

As of June 2001 over 400 NCD Surveys have been done in churches from 18 denominations and movements in our region.

Questions

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

PO Box 1002 Nathan Street
Brighton, Qld, 4017
Phone: (+61 7) 3869 0928 Fax: (+617) 3869 0528
Email: office@directionresources.com.au
Website: www.directionresources.com.au

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Accredited NCD Coach: