

Essential Qualities of healthy Churches

(Pastor Jörg Gintrowski, Lutherhaus Jena - based on Christian A. Schwarz : Natural Church Development)

Christian Schwarz surveyed more than 10000 local churches and he discovered 8 principles:

In a healthy church You will find...

1. Empowering leadership

Eph 4,11 *Christ himself called the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*

Who acts out the work of service? Who enables the Body?

Good leaders empower believers for ministry. They enable the body to act out service. Leaders delegate responsibility and let God's energy be seen in other members. Pastors need to be both goal- and relationship oriented.

Goal – Orientation means: They keep the vision alive and attractive to the members of the congregation. They celebrate the achievements and they show the next step. They set challenging but achievable goals.

Person-Orientation means having an open and compassionate heart for all staff members. They get help and understanding and attention when they are in trouble.

> When we empower Christians, who were passive parishioners before, we will „wake up the sleeping giant“. These are the sleeping potentials within the whole body of Christ.

2. Gift-oriented ministry

In healthy churches members are able to recognize and use their God-given talents and spiritual gifts for ministry within the church and in the local community. We help people to discover their gifts. We give them opportunity to try and apply them. They get true and realistic feedbacks. We don't tolerate an ungifted person in an unfitting place. On the other hand: We praise them and encourage them when they do well. The greatest favour we can do a person is giving him an cooperating function in church-life. People are hungry for sense and purpose: everyone wants to play an important role. Their life *is* most important when they become contributors to the kingdom of God by fulfilling the task that God has designed and gifted them for. Find this place with them and confirm them their importance!

3. Passionate spirituality

I would prefer to call it: A fervent love for Christ and his people, for my brothers and sisters and also a burning love for lost sheep, for non-Christians. This is the inner attitude we need.

Christians in these congregations are "on fire" (Spirit filled). They have a genuine relationship with God. People's lives are committed to their faith. They are enthusiastic and joyful.

They will imitate their pastor: If you can feel the pastor's passion and love for Christ and the kingdom of God, so becomes the rest of the congregation. „You can light others only if there is a burning fire inside yourself.“ Or as St. Paul puts it: „Follow me as I follow Christ!“ 1. Kor 11,1

4. Functional structures

The structure in a healthy church promotes growth rather than hindering it. Volunteers are set free to develop own ideas. Initiatives from within the congregation are supported and not hindered. Responsibility and decision-making is entrusted to the persons realising it. They get their own budget for their department and authorization for decisions. They are free to find their own solutions. Money, decision and power for their realm is handed over to the ones who do the church work. The effect is: they will identify with their tasks with their whole heart.

5. Inspiring worship services

In healthy churches people are emotionally involved in the services. Many Christians are in action during the service. They contribute what God has given them: „*When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.*“ (1. Kor 14,26). In these services there is a strong expectation of the presence of the Lord. The words of the Bible are honoured as words of God. A sense of adoration, of holiness of freedom and joy is present.

6. Live-sharing small groups

These groups are to go beyond study and discussion, they want to apply God's message to daily life. Small groups are the place where fellowship can really be practiced. Groups multiply by splitting into two groups after a time. Each new group invites new participants and selects an additional co-leader.

7. Needs-orientated evangelism

In healthy churches the pastor knows which parishoners have the gift of evangelism and encourage them to make use of it. She/he also encourages all members to individually share Christ with those they know. *Few* are gifted for evangelisation as a special task, but *all* are called to witness Christ. 1. Pt 3,15 calls believers to „*always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*“ Everyone should contribute to the evangelistic calling of the whole congregation. Evangelistic efforts should be focused on a person's questions and needs. Christ wants to speak into his life.

8. Loving relationships

In healthy churches you can experience christian love, not just talking about it. Love expresses itself by spending time together, by encouraging each others, by being aware of personal problems, as well as by celebrating, sharing and laughing together. The small group is a spiritual family where we learn to treat each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

For Jesus, the spiritual family goes before the physical family: *Mk 3,35 Whoever does Gods will, ist my brother and sister...* *Lk 9,60 Let the dead bury their dead,...*

A loving atmosphere among the church-goers is the most efficient means of evangelism. If you really serve and love each other, everybody wants to belong to this community.