

What makes a healthy church?

ACTUALLY THE ANSWER to that question is "who," not "what." Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). Man-made formulas and fads don't make a church strong. Jesus does. We plant seeds and water them, but God gives the increase.

Nor should we measure churches by worldly standards of success. A healthy church isn't necessarily the one everybody's talking about. The church described in the book of Acts didn't have a Web site, but they spread the gospel effectively by word of mouth. They didn't have a building, but they worshiped and served God in public places and in private homes. They did the basics with excellence, and God blessed them with growth. The second chapter of Acts tells us they grew up (in their relationship with God); they grew together (in fellowship with each other); they grew out (by influencing their culture); and they grew larger (by bringing lost people to Christ).

Regardless of size, location, or culture, healthy churches have some common characteristics.

1. *An atmosphere for growth.* Healthy churches have a positive congregational self-image. People talk enthusiastically about their church and find it natural to invite friends. Joy fills the air. Problems are faced with honesty and love. Unity prevails.

2. *Effective Bible teaching and preaching.* Healthy churches are "devoted to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). Sermons are practical, scriptural, and soul-stirring. In small groups and one-on-one discussions, God's Word is applied to daily life.

3. *Strong, faithful leadership.* Healthy churches are led by people of integrity and courage who have no agenda except to serve Christ. They make faith-stretching and visionary plans, and then persevere to achieve them. A team spirit among the leaders brings stability and focus.

4. *Mobilization of the membership.* Healthy churches practice the ministry of all believers. A high level of involvement

is the norm. There's oneness of doctrine, but diversity of service. Members of the church serve the Lord in their own unique areas of giftedness. They give generously and sacrificially to advance the kingdom of God.

5. *Effective evangelism.* Healthy churches carry out the Great Commission by making disciples locally and around the world. People share their faith naturally, support missions faithfully, and genuinely care about their neighbors. They strive for excellence in every interaction with visitors, inquirers, community leaders, and new residents.

6. *Consistent retention of new members.* Healthy churches "close the back door" so new members make friends, find a place to serve, develop a regular pattern of worship attendance, connect with a small group, and identify with the church's goals and plans.

7. *Meaningful and attractive worship.* In healthy churches worship services are sincere, reverent, and alive. God's presence is evident. Activities are bathed in prayer. When unbelievers come into such churches, they are moved to exclaim, "God is really among you!" (1 Corinthians 14:25).

8. *A strong sense of community.* New Testament Christians were urged to build strong personal relationships and healthy families (Colossians 3:11-21). They ate together, opened their homes to one another, and shared material possessions with those in need (Acts 2:42-46). They cared for the poor, the aged, and the sick. To put it simply, healthy churches practice Christian love.

The Lord is building his church. If you and I want, we can join him. What will you do this week to help your church be a healthy church? ■



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