

Natural Church Development Process Started at Immanuel Lutheran Church

Three years ago the Immanuel Church Council started asking, “What will Immanuel Lutheran church look like in the future? Will it be 'business as usual,' or will we make an intentional decision to look at the health of our church and then take strategic steps to move forward?”

As they did their questioning, the church council learned of the Natural Church Development Institute (NCD) program for church improvement. The NCD program is a way of understanding church health and growth that views the church as a living organism. The focus is not on numerical growth, but on improving the health of the church. They found that when a church is sufficiently healthy, numerical growth would follow.



The Natural Church Development process measures the health of a local church in eight areas that have been found to be essential to healthy church growth. Developed by the Institute of Natural Church Development in Germany, their NCD survey grows out of what was probably the most extensive study of church growth ever conducted, involving over 1000 churches, in 70 countries, and with virtually every religion. This study revealed a clear positive relationship between these eight Quality Characteristics and church growth.

These eight "Quality Characteristics" are universally used in building healthy churches! They are:

Empowering Leadership

Inspiring Worship Services

Gift-oriented Ministry

Holistic Small Groups

Passionate Spirituality

Need-oriented Evangelism

Effective Structures

Loving Relationships

Our council members learned that the secret of growing churches does not consist in pushing or pulling the church in human strength and efforts -- but in releasing and developing the potential God himself uses to build his church. Then growth in numbers and spiritual quality occurs all by itself! if we remove the obstacles that prevent growth. Growing churches use the growth principle that is found in the bible.

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts, and grows; though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain -- first the stalk, then the head, and then 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

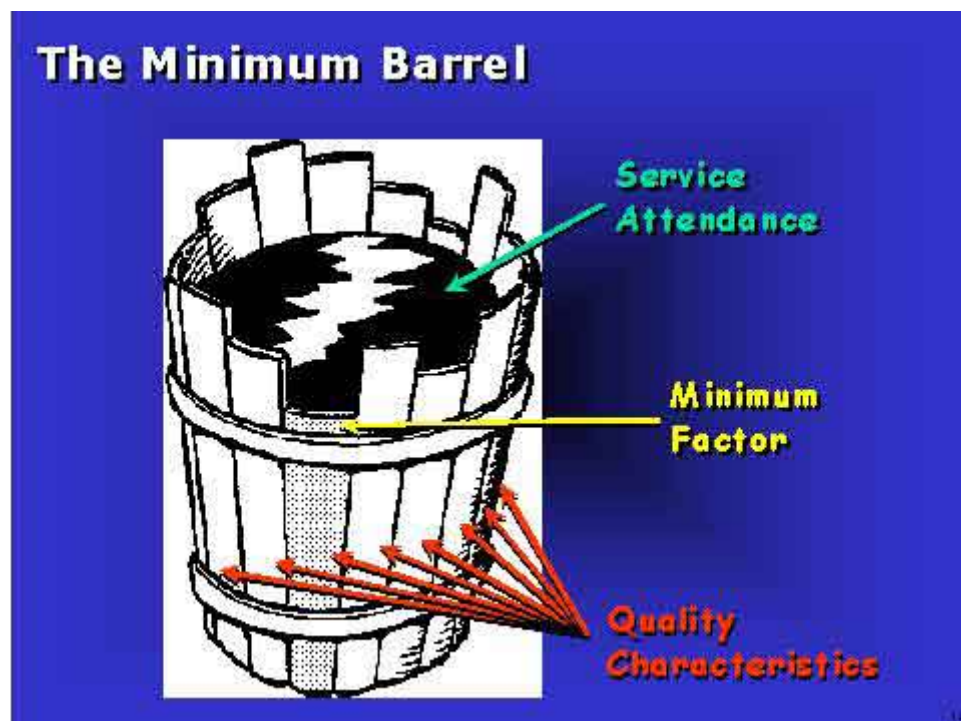
With this background, the Council decided to start the NCD process in 2007. This year, Matt Cermak, Council President asked several members of the congregation to form Immanuel's NCD Team. The following members accepted his invitation to serve as the Immanuel NCD Team during this 12-month process: Jim Drown, Becky Frysinger, Jim Krenek, Mike Proper, Teri Sime, and Richard Wellman.

Pastor Jim Watson of Christ Lutheran Church in Michigan Center has agreed to help the Immanuel NCD Team as their *coach*. Pr. Watson has been trained and certified in the NCD process and has been assigned by the Conference to assist congregations in the NCD process.

The Immanuel NCD Team will use a carefully prepared survey developed by the Natural Church Development Institute. This survey was prepared and tested in 70 countries throughout the world. The NCD process requires that the survey be administered to 30 diverse members in our congregation. The survey given in April and will be scored by the Institute for Natural Church Development Institute at their national office in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Each of the eight Quality Characteristics will receive a score following the survey. The NCD Team will especially focus on the weakest Quality Characteristic score. They will then develop an Action Plan to strengthen our church in that particular area.

After one year, the survey will be repeated to evaluate progress on the weakest Quality Characteristic factor and to see that the other quality characteristics did not drop.



The NCD Process Reveals Immanuel's Minimum Factor.

The diagram of a wood stave barrel provides a good visual of the NCD process. The lowest survey score is called the Minimum Factor. This indicates the area that is likely doing the most to limit healthy growth in our church. This suggests that focusing attention on strengthening this area is likely to produce the greatest return on investment in improving the church's health.

As the minimum barrel illustrates, to increase capacity, it is necessary to increase the size of the minimum stave, not the highest one. Many churches are usually aware of their need to improve in their strongest areas because they have been giving focused attention to these areas. Often, the Minimum Factor is a "blind spot" that has received limited attention.

While people may initially be attracted to a church because of its strengths, if the church is not retaining as many of those newcomers as it should, it is often because of a weakness in the Minimum Factor area. Strengthening the Minimum Factor is often a way to close the back door.

Refer to this ELCA web site for additional information <http://www.elca.org/outreach/ncd/>

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