

# Understanding Natural Church Development

## The Principles of NCD

An understanding of what makes churches grow, whether explicitly or intuitively, is necessary to see growth take place. Very often we look to models or programmes of “success” in other churches and try to replicate them, but to no avail. Each church is unique so programmes and models cannot be successfully imposed or transplanted.

The German theologian, Christian Schwarz, recognised this reality and sought to answer the question—are there any principles present in all healthy growing churches that **are** transferable? To find answers he looked to the bible and to nature and undertook empirical research.

The bible contains several passages which give us some clues about how churches grow: *The kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed... the seed sprouts and grows ... **all by itself** the soil produces grain ...as soon as the grain is ripe he puts the sickle to it.* **Mark 4:26-29**

*They devoted themselves to ... and **the Lord added** to their number daily those who were being saved.* **Acts 2:42-47**



*I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but **God made it grow.** 1 Cor 3:6*

The bible teaches that we have a part to play but **God** is responsible for the growth.



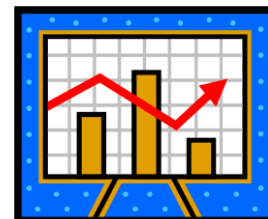
When we look at nature we see how God has made his creation to operate and we can draw similar conclusions. Every organism has “all-by-itself” growth potential. Organisms grow, thrive & multiply when the environment is right!

Schwarz also identifies **Six Growth Forces** that describe how nature works. These can greatly improve our decision making e.g. to ensure a new work is sustainable and can multiply as needed.

### Six Growth Forces

*Interdependence  
Multiplication  
Energy Transformation  
Sustainability  
Symbiosis  
Fruitfulness*

Whilst growth is God-given and happens “all by itself” we have a responsibility to create the right environment in which growth can take place. Hence the name “**Natural Church Development**”.



When it came to undertaking empirical research Schwarz established a research project of 1,000 churches, in 32 countries, on 5 continents and in 18

languages. He was keen to establish as wide a research base as possible of churches of different sizes, denominations, cultures and settings in order to identify if there were common factors applicable everywhere.

The result of this research was the identification of the **8 Quality Characteristics** (see separate leaflet for definitions)

### The 8 Essential Qualities

*Empowering Leadership  
Gift-based Ministry  
Passionate Spirituality  
Effective Structures  
Inspiring Worship  
Holistic Small Groups  
Need-oriented Evangelism  
Loving Relationships*

present in all healthy growing churches of every description—hence his application of the epithet “essential” to these 8 quality characteristics. The research has now extended to over 82,000 churches!

In the diocese of Coventry we are encouraging all parishes to seek to develop these 8 Quality Characteristics and so to create the environment in which growth can take place “all by itself”.

## The Processes of NCD

The principles of NCD outlined above are universally applicable. We are developing processes and using NCD tools to help churches as they seek to apply these principles.

A regular and accurate assessment of the quality characteristics of a church are critical to

this and to good planning. The wisdom of an outsider to help in this process is also invaluable. This is why churches are being encouraged to use the NCD survey every year or so and why the diocese is offering a mentor to every church wanting to do this.

The survey is undertaken by core members of the congregation—all of them if less than 30 members, a sample of 30 of them if more! The results of the survey give detailed information about a church’s strengths that are to be celebrated, and their not so strong aspects that need to be developed.

Their mentor helps them understand the details of the survey and works with them as they decide their priorities for action. We pay particular attention to the weakest quality (the minimum factor) as this is what is currently limiting the health and growth potential of the church.

The survey helps to identify not only the weakest quality but also the reasons why it is the weakest—this enables precise action to address the issues identified. As this is done over a period of time the overall quality of the church improves and God-given growth begins to happen “all by itself” as the right environment is created.



## Applying the Principles and Implementing the Process

The Healthy Churches Development Mentor and his team are here to help you and



welcome the opportunity to talk with clergy, leadership teams, PCCs and indeed whole congregations, about the principles and the processes outlined in this leaflet, and how to get started.

### For more information contact:

Rev. Tim Mitchell  
 Healthy Churches Development Mentor  
 Diocesan Offices  
 1 Hill Top, Coventry, CV1 5AB  
 Email: [tim.mitchell@covcofe.org](mailto:tim.mitchell@covcofe.org)  
 Tel: 07496 821460  
 Facebook: [facebook.com/CovDio8EQs](https://www.facebook.com/CovDio8EQs)  
 Web: [dioceseofcoventry.org/healthychurches](http://dioceseofcoventry.org/healthychurches)



## Creating a Growth Environment

An introduction to Natural Church Development



The Diocese of Coventry