

**NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT**  
*QUALITY CHARACTERISTIC I*

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JANUARY 14, 2007

**“Empowering Leadership”**

When Dawna and I came for our take-in interview with the Staff/Parish Relations Committee in the late Spring of last year, I was asked about my thoughts concerning moving this church forward. A big part of my reply was that I'd like to see us engage in the process of Natural Church Development. We had gone through the steps twice during my years at Blairsville and we found it quite helpful.

Well, the time has come! Today we begin an eight week series of sermons on what Christian Schwartz calls the “Quality Characteristics” of a healthy church. These sermons are intended to prepare us (about 30 of us) to fill out a survey on how we see our church. We'll take the survey after the sermon series is finished. This survey will point out which characteristic we see ourselves as weakest in (called our “minimum factor”) as well as which ones are our strongest. Then we can do some serious planning on how to address our minimum factor by using our evident strengths.

All of this is based upon the results of research done by a German Christian scholar by the name of Christian Schwartz. By studying churches all over the world, he and his team have concluded that there are eight distinctive quality characteristics which are more developed in growing healthy churches than in those which are less healthy and not growing and, it follows, the developing by us of these quality characteristics may well be a “key to success” in our growing as a church here in Coraopolis.

So, today I begin the series focusing on these quality characteristics to help us to prepare for the taking of the survey. This should definitely help us to determine our area of concentration (minimum factor) for our planning for the next year or so.

Christian Schwartz has written: Church growth literature on the topic of leadership typically states that the leadership style of pastors in growing churches is more project (or task) oriented than people-oriented, more goal than relationship-oriented, more authoritarian than team-oriented. In their search for model-churches, some church growth authors probably lean toward more large churches (which tend to employ this kind of leadership) than do growing churches. The two (large churches and growing churches) however, are far from being the same.

Schwartz's research produced results different from what existing church growth literature would have led them to expect. While it is true that goal-orientation is an important leadership trait, it is interesting to observe that this is not an area where leaders of growing and non-growing churches differ greatly. Their study demonstrated that,

while pastors of growing churches are not people-persons whose lose themselves in interactions with individuals, yet on average they are somewhat more relationship-persons and partnership oriented than their colleagues in declining churches.

The key distinction is probably best expressed by the word “empowerment”. Leaders of growing churches concentrate on empowering other Christians for ministry. [Some examples of this in our church would include my work with the Confirmation mentors and my teaching of the Celebration of Discipline class. In both instances I am consciously trying to “empower” the persons involved for their own expressions of ministry.]

In other words, I and they do not use lay workers as ‘helpers’ in attaining our own goals and fulfilling our own visions. Such pastors are seeking to equip, motivate, and mentor individuals, enabling them to become all that God wants them to be.

If we take a closer look at this process, we understanding why such leaders need to be both goal and relationship oriented. This “bipolarity” (if you will!) must be incarnated in the personality of the leader.

What we are encountering here is referred to in the Natural Church Development material as the “all-by-itself” principle. Leaders who realize their own empowerment by empowering others experience how the all-by-itself principle contributes to growth.

Rather than handling the bulk of church responsibility on their own, they invest the majority of their time in discipleship, delegation and multiplication. Thus, the energy that they expend can be multiplied indefinitely. God’s energy, not human effort and pressure, is released to set the church in motion.

Their research data also call into question a tendency in church growth literature to illustrate leadership principles with examples from mega churches. In many instances, their materials showcase ingenious leaders who are so gifted that it is unrealistic to refer to their churches as ‘reproducible models’.

Now for the good news: pastors of growing churches do not need to be superstars. In fact, most of the pastors with the highest scores in their survey are little known. They do generally provide us, however, with more helpful basic leadership principles than do most of the world-famous ‘spiritual superstars’.

In talking about this quality characteristic called “empowering leadership”, I need to point out that in order for this process to work, there must be lay persons who are willing to be mentored, to be led in this way. Thus, I am deeply grateful to all of you who have signed on to minister as confirmation mentors, learners of the classical spiritual disciplines, Sunday School and Bible Study teachers as well as anyone else who has stepped forward to grow in Christian discipleship by mentoring, discipling and teaching others. In this way, empowering leadership grows and multiplies.

Thanks be to God for you!