

**NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT**  
*QUALITY CHARACTERISTIC VIII*

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CORAOPOLIS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
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**“LOVING RELATIONSHIPS”**

Well, here we are at the final sermon on the Eight Quality Characteristics of a healthy church: “Loving Relationships”. Our Church Council has decided that we will take the NCD survey on Sunday, March 18, 2007, after we share the UMW lunch after church. We still need two persons who meet the requirements to sign up (and please let me know if you have signed, but cannot be here on the 18<sup>th</sup>.)

The Jewish people, it is said, have a story to answer every question that a child might ask. A favorite of mine is the story that is told in answer to the child’s question: “Why did God choose to build His Temple where He did?”

Two brothers in Jerusalem shared ownership of a mill for grinding grain. One brother was a bachelor, the other was married with three children. At the end of each day, they took the grain that they had milled and divided it equally into separate sacks.

One night the bachelor brother thought, “This is not right. I am alone and don’t need much, but my brother has a wife and family. He deserves the larger share.” So sneaking back to the mill each night, he took part of his share and poured it into the brother’s sack.

The married brother also thought one night: “This is not right. When I am old I will have children to support me, but my brother will be all alone. He deserves the larger share.” So sneaking back to the mill each night he took part of his share and poured it into his brother’s sack. They thought it a miracle to find their sacks refilled each morning.

One night, however, the brothers left their homes at the same time to sneak back to the mill, and by coincidence, met on the streets with their sacks in their hands. Instantly, they knew what was happening and fell into each other’s arms weeping. God looked down on the scene and said: *“This is where love meets. Here I will build My Temple.”*

Several years ago, when the NCD people published materials to help individuals, groups and entire churches learn how to express Christian love, some “experts” said that these were not “church growth materials”. Yet research indicates that there is a highly significant relationship between the ability of a church to demonstrate love and that church’s long-term growth potential. Growing churches possess on the average a measurably higher “love quotient” than do stagnant or declining churches.

To determine this “love quotient”, they asked (among other things) how much time church members spend with each other outside of official church-sponsored events. For example, how often do they invite one another over for meals or a cup of coffee? How generous is the church in doling out compliments? To what extent is the pastor

aware of the personal problems of the lay workers in the congregation? How much laughter is there in the church?

They found that these issues, which some experts discounted as irrelevant, contain important church growth principles. To put it even more pointedly, whereas a “seeker service” cannot be called a church growth principle any more than an evangelistic crusade” or the practice of “spiritual warfare” (as valuable as they may be), it can be demonstrated that there is a significant connection between “laughter in a church” and that church’s qualitative and numerical growth.

Genuine practical love has a God-generated magnetic power far more effective than evangelistic programs which depend almost entirely on verbal communication. People do not want to hear us talk about love; they want to experience how Christian love really works.

The more technocratic a church is, the more difficulties it will have in living out Jesus’ commandment to love. Since the technocratic approach understands faith primarily as the fulfillment of dogmatic and moral standards, it produces a deficit among Christians in their ability to love.

But the spiritualistic approach is just as detrimental in its effect on a church’s love potential. In contrast to the biblical definition of love – as fruit, action or deed – these churches promote a rather secular concept of love. For they tend to view love as a feeling which overwhelms you (if you are lucky!) and then disappears just as mysteriously. According to this perspective, it is utterly impossible to actually measure the love potential of a church, and all planned efforts to increase this love potential are considered useless from the start.

It is interesting to note that the most frequent “minimum factor” (or the lowest score”) of churches with more than 1000 in attendance is the quality characteristic “loving relationships”. But wherever there is a lack of love, further church development is severely hampered. We don’t have over 1,000 in worship on any given Sunday. But, based on my experience here over the last eight months, I’ll be shocked if “loving relationships” is our lowest score.