

1 What is a "Healthy" Congregation?

How do we define "Congregation"? Since we use the word "church" to have several levels of meaning simultaneously, we need to ask the same question on two different levels (or in both kingdoms, if you will) -

<i>The Congregation in the Kingdom of the Left Hand</i>	<i>The Congregation in the Kingdom of the Right Hand</i>	<i>Comments / Notes</i>
The Icon of the Bride of Christ	The Bride of Christ	As on a computer screen, the "icon" is a portal through which we enter the complete experience of the thing represented. The church shows us the <i>Mystery of the Bride of Christ</i> as well as the Trinity.
The Icon of the Trinity	The Trinity in Fellowship with All Believers	
Church Militant	Church Triumphant	
Colony of Heaven	City of God	"Colonists" know that their real citizenship is elsewhere - in their home country
Pilgrims / sojourners	Permanent residents	
Franchise of a larger organization	Body of Christ	Left hand => organizational; right hand => organic
State-chartered non-profit organization - 501(c)(3)	Family of God / Community of Believers	
Mission Statement - "Make disciples" (production)	Mission Statement - "Love others" (relational)	Is the church about production or is it about relationships?

These are just a few examples of Ecclesiologies, systematic theologies about the Church. There are others, but these are enough to get us started.

How do we define "Healthy." What does "Healthy" or "Unhealthy" look like in each of these models?

<i>Model</i>	<i>This is what "Healthy" looks like</i>	<i>This is what "Unhealthy" looks like</i>
Bride of Christ	Faithful	Adulterous (Hosea)
Trinity	Eph. 4 ("One")	1 Corinthians 1 ("Is Christ divided?")

Church Militant	Taking up the cross or Gospel	Abandoning the cross or Gospel
Colony	Citizens of Heaven	Citizens of earth
Pilgrims	Goal - home	Goal - “the journey”
Franchise	Producing / growing / profitable	Non-producing / shrinking / unprofitable
Non-Profit Organization	Helping others	Helping selves
Body of Christ	All parts working together under one Head	Disunity
Family of God / Community of Believers	Mutual conversation and consolation	Mutual suspicion, criticism, and judgment
Mission - "make"	More	Fewer / None
Mission - "Love"	Love	Discord

2 What are the pros and cons of assessing a congregation’s health and “labeling” a congregation?

1. Who is it that determines the "labels"? The action of naming is an indication of authority (as with Adam), but also bullying.
2. Who has the authority?
 Is such authority claimed,
 or is it given (by God? by a congregation to a "consultant" or "District Executive"? by congregations to a Synod?),
 or is it imagined?
3. Who determines the assessment tools, whether they're appropriate and how they are to be used?

Resources

- LombardMennonite Peace Center
- Pete Steinke
- Pete Scazzero “The Emotionally Healthy Church”
- Intentional Interim Ministry
- Ministry to "the least of these" / downward mobility? See Exodus 12:3-4 (NIV1984)

3 Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. 4 If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are.

Definitions

Henri Nouwen's "Downward Mobility"

"Indeed, the one who was from the beginning with God and who was god revealed himself as a small, helpless child; as a refugee in Egypt; as an obedient adolescent and inconspicuous adult: as a penitent disciple of the Baptizer; as a preacher from Galilee, followed by some simple fishermen; as a man who ate with sinners and talked with strangers; as an outcast, a criminal, a threat to his people. He moved from power to powerlessness, from greatness to smallness, from success to failure, from strength to weakness, from glory to ignominy. The whole life of Jesus of Nazareth was a life in which all upward mobility was resisted...The divine way is indeed the downward way." - Henri Nouwen

Henri Nouwen - "In the Name of Jesus"

p. 81 - "Jesus confronts him with the hard truth that the servant-leader is the leader who is being led to unknown, undesirable, and painful places. The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross."

p. 86 - "It is essential to be able to discern...the ways in which we are led to the cross and through the cross to the resurrection."

Food for thought - to what extent do these words of Henri Nouwen guide us as we consider how to minister to/with congregations?

A better way? From Larry Crabb's "Connecting"

Thinking "problems" -

- What is wrong with this church?
- Where is this church's sin and damage and hurt?
- How can we smooth out the bumps in this church's life, first by exposing the problems we see and then by figuring out how to deal with them?
- What don't we like about this church, and how should we help them to deal with it?

Thinking "vision" -

- How has God built this congregation?
- What is He wanting to release through all the joys and heartaches of this church's life?
- What is being released right now?
- What strengths does this congregation have that, if surrendered to God, could powerfully advance the Kingdom?
- What potential remains unrealized because of undealt-with weaknesses?
- How does this church uniquely bless me?
- What does that tell me about the character strengths that God is specially weaving into the fabric of this congregation's soul?

FOR NEXT TIME . . .

3 *What are we doing, or what can we do as a congregation, circuit or district to enhance or improve the health of congregations? . . . together with . . .*

4 *What are we doing or what can we do to minister to congregations and pastors who have already accepted the “label” of being an unhealthy, dying or declining congregation?*