

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS**

*(Report to Synod from the Task Force on Provincial Administration, June 1, 2009)*

### **FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST PERSONALLY AND CORPORATELY— bringing individuals and the congregation into a greater harmony with God with a new sense of faith, love and hope**

We trust and glorify God. We are aware of the nature and presence of God within the congregation. Because of God's empowering presence, we seek to find out what God wants. We know that God is working in the lives of members and in the life of our congregation. In words and spirit, we acknowledge Jesus Christ our Chief Elder as head of the church, are focused on Him as Savior and Lord, and submit to his will in doctrine and deed. We have a high level of enthusiasm for Christ and a genuine sense of the need for Christ in our lives and in our congregation. We remember who Jesus is, understand conversion and the Good News, and are loyal to Him. We belong to an infinite and eternal Spirit, respect spiritual authority, and are energized by our active and growing faith. We recognize the importance of God's Word in our lives and actively seek spiritual formation and growth. As a congregation, we ensure that spiritual growth opportunities exist. We remember and practice the tenets of our faith as given in the Bible, the Ground of the Unity, and the Covenant for Christian Living.

### **MISSION—an outward focus that networks locally, nationally, and globally to remember, seek out, and serve our neighbors**

Rather than a focus on survival and maintenance, the congregation has a clear, active, faith-based mission and outreach vision and plan that extend beyond the church walls. The congregation uses effective fact-gathering methods to find an appropriate niche in local and world outreach, to maintain an awareness of needs, and to implement responsive actions. Within the congregation, there is a commitment to social justice and action. Actions are need-oriented, have cultural relevance, are practical and diverse, and serve the people in the identified need area. Members have a sense of being in mission, have an outward orientation toward neighbors around the church and in the world, and are engaged in intentional service to meet identified needs. The congregation recognizes that *evangelism* spreads the knowledge of God and the saving grace of Jesus Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit is driven by Christ's commands, is active and visible, and includes the development of new congregations. Members understand evangelism and have an ongoing willingness to participate. Members are encouraged to share their faith with others, particularly those who are inactive or who are lost. The congregation provides appropriate education to equip members for outreach and discipleship service.

### **GROWTH—increasing participation, attendance and membership**

The members, boards, pastor(s), and staff of the congregation have a positive attitude toward growth. There is an intentional process leading to growth. The congregation recognizes the need to facilitate spiritual experiences for newcomers and to build believers who love God, who acknowledge the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and who serve their neighbors in the community and wider world. The congregation acknowledges changes in culture and society and responds positively and appropriately. The congregation recognizes the need to attract and retain new families, young people and children. There is a continuing willingness to reach out to the community with an ongoing attention to non-members in the community. The congregation recognizes the potential within its neighborhood and adjusts plans to widen its reach. There is an ongoing process for making the presence of the congregation and its ministry known so as to attract visitors and potential new members. An intentional greeting ministry exists and there is a genuine welcoming of visitors by all members. New member classes are conducted to provide an understanding of church membership and expectations. There is open accessibility and

intentional inclusion which ensures a sense of belonging and makes room for new member participation. All members make it a point to meet and know new members. Within the congregation there is a supply of shepherds who help to inspire involvement within the whole church and within groups. The congregation takes into account the widespread location of members in developing and implementing congregational opportunities for participation and service. The results are a wider range of ages within the congregation, a strong desire by members to participate, and a stable or increasing level of participation.

### **LEADERSHIP—ensuring wise direction, administration, and accountability for the community**

There is strong, effective leadership by the pastor and boards that is team oriented, empowering, inspiring, strategic, and risk-taking and which sets and leads the direction of the congregation toward becoming and remaining healthy. The pastor's skills have been matched to the real needs of the congregation. The pastor's leadership style results in positive relationships between clergy and laity and between the official boards and the congregation. All members have access to leadership. Board members are active participants in the congregation's offerings and understand the real needs for mission and ministry. The congregation has an efficient process for identifying and evaluating needs, developing approaches, and making decisions. There is transparency and honesty in decisions and actions; and, communication is open so that everyone has the same information. Existing and new lay leadership resources are nurtured and developed. Servant leadership development exists to cultivate leaders and members. Pastors identify and lead those individuals who show potential for becoming ministers of the Gospel. There is a continuing process for conferring leadership responsibility to a wider group of members including younger members; and, new leaders are encouraged and supported in their positions. Members exhibit a responsibility for the congregation, its fellowship and its outreach, understand and support the priorities and directions set by leaders, and actively participate as leaders and workers.

### **WORSHIP—proclaiming God's Word through scripture, preaching, music, and sacrament**

Worship is the center of congregational life. The pastoral leadership ensures a genuine worship experience that is God-exalting, Spirit-filled, vital, inspiring, meaningful and nourishing. Excellence is sought in every aspect of worship practices. The corporate worship service fuels ministry, spiritual growth and commitment. The worship program fits the nature of the congregation and its schedules, may include active lay leadership, and satisfies members' needs. Worship includes a well-chosen liturgy, appropriate music, congregational singing, and persuasive, expository, biblically-based preaching applicable to members' lives. Generational preferences are understood and incorporated. Diverse approaches to worship may be used to include new forms, words and music for expressing faith. Worshipers feel included, valued, nourished, taught, prayed for, and uplifted; and, there is an atmosphere that exudes warmth. Member participation is stable or increasing.

### **COOPERATION—bringing church members into greater harmony with one another to build community**

Within the congregation, there is a spirit of community and mutual love and a caring about one another. The congregation operates as an authentic community with a strong and growing sense of belonging. The congregation is more concerned with people than with its institutions and emphasizes developing significant relationships within the congregation which are caring, loving, and nurturing. Although members have their own needs and care for themselves, each is aware of other members' needs and shows compassion by focusing on others rather than self. Members know and act on why they are the church and are clear about how they function together. Members encourage and practice the inclusion of old and new members and are

supportive of all members who assume leadership roles. There is a celebration of diversity and an acknowledgement that others' ideas and participation have merit. Members practice mutual respect even during conflicts and are non-judgmental about differing opinions and individual characteristics. There is trust at all levels and members are capable of managing conflict to produce strengths. There is openness to understanding the full story before criticizing, to focus and act on the tough issues at hand, and not to dwell on past events or issues. Members acknowledge and accept their responsibilities within the community, refrain from placing blame, and seek to overcome their own discontent through positive thought and response. Members have a new sense of empowerment and cultivate unity and a shared congregational vision. Members feel free to involve themselves in congregational leadership and service. Members exhibit a teachable spirit directed toward understanding and participating in change. Members relate positively to their environment and participate in the congregation. Members practice personal Christian disciplines and follow church discipline.

**STEWARDSHIP—the effective use of individual and community time, talent and treasure**

Stewardship and generosity are nurtured. There is a positive approach for teaching, modeling and encouraging stewardship. A well-organized laity understands, demonstrates and uses total stewardship practices. Members are committed to support the congregation with time, talent and treasure and work to discover and develop their gifts of service and use them for ministry. Members are aware of, and appreciate, the spiritual gifts of members and the congregation; and, there are more than enough willing volunteers who use their time and talents for mission and ministry. Members understand the real needs for ministry and respond financially with ongoing support. There is financial stability and transparency and adequate resources and facilities for ministry. There is good stewardship of resources; and, the congregation understands and faces the costs necessary for change and growth.

**MINISTRY—the processes through which we learn and grow as individuals and in community to care for ourselves and serve others**

The congregation is committed to the agenda of God including a clear understanding of, and strong conviction about, the purpose of the church. The congregation is in tune with its identity (locally, provincially, and worldwide), and recognizes the things that it can do and do well. The organizational structure for ministry is functional, is created to facilitate effectiveness throughout the congregation and ensure success, and is consistently led by lay members. There is an openness to change, the ability to be flexible and evolving, and to be culturally connected internally and externally. The past is appreciated and honored yet the congregation understands that it must deal with the present and chart a path to the future. The congregation is committed to meeting the needs of both church and unchurched people. The congregation has a clearly defined and member-owned vision, purpose and direction which include ongoing programs in one to three ministry areas for which the congregation has a positive reputation due to its strengths. Christian spirituality and growth are promoted and facilitated through systematic theological studies and the exploration of members' faith; and, there are intentional, ongoing actions to equip members for discipleship. Specific, effective programs exist for faithful and extensive pastoral care and lay visitation. Intentional programs are in place to support and care for parents, children and youth and to equip families to learn and minister to themselves. There are well-defined, focused ministries to meet older adult members' needs. An effective educational program for all ages is Biblically-based and teaches sacred stories and standards to help in living the Christian life. Intentional and ongoing prayer-centered ministries for the congregation, groups, and individuals give attention to the role of prayer, the practice of prayer, and the trusting of prayer. Smaller congregational groups including special fellowships are encouraged and exist where people can form deeper ties to one another and connect their faith with daily life. There are adequate opportunities for ministry and service by members of all ages

and a commitment to participate exists; and, in developing and scheduling opportunities, the planners take into account the scattered nature of its members.

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