

Marks of an (un)healthy church - Questions

There are many letters to churches in the New Testament. These often seek to address important health issues in the life of the church where they are written to specific churches. Some of the most direct are the letters in Revelation 2 & 3 - with God's very direct words to seven churches.

Churches often (always?) need direct words to encourage their healthiness and this set of questions is an opportunity for discerning what God is saying to us. Begin by praying for the discernment and leading of God's Spirit as you reflect on KPC and our health. Ask God to lay on our hearts those things He wants to bring to our attention.

INDIVIDUALLY

For each person to do individually first -

- Rate our church in terms of its 'health' as you understand it - don't think too much about it but pick a score:

1	Really unhealthy
2	Some serious health problems but coping
3	Moderately healthy but with important things to work on
4	Pretty fit - only a few small issues
5	In excellent shape - couldn't be better!

- Now reflect on why you chose that score:
 - What factors were you considering when assessing our health?
 - What positives and negatives did you come up with?

TOGETHER

- Compare your scores and the reasons for them - discuss where they agree and where they differ and perhaps why.
- Thinking of Michael Frost's question (featured in the talk this week) "What are we telling and sharing about the reign of God and what it looks like for the people in our area?", where is our church life most deficient in its expression?
- There are several different frameworks for thinking about church health. If you have time discuss where we stand on the dimensions expressed in the one below (copy the sheet to everyone in the group) and see if you can agree the priority areas we might need to work on together.

This list of characteristics was observed by looking at churches and has been used by many in the UK to look at their church to identify where focus is needed:

We would really appreciate feedback from your discussion on the areas that you sense God is leading us. Please can the group facilitator email notes and thoughts to the office (office@kpc.org.uk).

The seven characteristics of healthy churches

1. Energized by faith - rather than just keeping things going or trying to survive

- worship and sacramental life: moves people to experience God's love
- motivation: energy comes from a desire to serve God and one another
- engaging with Scripture: in creative ways connect with life
- nurtures faith in Christ: helping people to grow in, and share their faith.

2. Outward-looking focus - with a 'whole life' rather than a 'church life' concern

- deeply rooted in the local community, working in partnership with other denominations, faiths, secular groups and networks
- passionate and prophetic about justice and peace, locally and globally
- makes connections between faith and daily living
- responds to human need by loving service

3. Seeks to find out what God wants - discerning the Spirit's leading rather than trying to please everyone

- vocation: seeks to explore what God wants it to be and do
- vision: develops and communicates a shared sense of where it is going
- mission priorities: consciously sets both immediate and long-term goals
- able to call for, and make, sacrifices, personal and corporate, in bringing about the above and living out the faith.

4. Faces the cost of change and growth - rather than resisting change and avoiding failure

- while embracing the past, it dares to take on new ways of doing things
- takes risks: and admits when things are not working, and learns from experience
- crises: responds creatively to challenges that face the church and community
- positive experiences of change: however small, are affirmed and built on

5. Operates as a community - rather than functioning as a club or religious organisation

- relationships: are nurtured, often in small groups, so people feel accepted and are helped to grow in faith and service
- leadership: lay and ordained work as a team to develop locally appropriate expressions of all seven marks of a healthy church
- lay ministry: the different gifts, experiences and faith journeys of all are valued and given expression in and beyond the life of the church.

6. Makes room for all - being inclusive rather than exclusive.

- welcome: works to include newcomers into the life of the church
- children and young people: are helped to belong, contribute and be nurtured in their faith
- enquirers are encouraged to explore and experience faith in Christ
- diversities: different social and ethnic backgrounds, mental and physical abilities, and ages, are seen as a strength.

7. Does a few things and do them well - focused rather than frenetic

- does the basics well: especially public worship, pastoral care, stewardship and administration
- occasional offices: make sense of life and communicate faith
- being good news as a church in its attitudes and ways of working
- enjoys what it does and is relaxed about what is not being done