

Beeston Baptist Church

Growing a healthy church

The marks of a healthy church

A healthy church is one that:

1. is energized by faith
2. has an outward-looking focus
3. seeks to find out what God wants
4. faces the cost change and growth
5. operates as a community
6. makes room for all
7. does a few things and does them well

As part of our response to the question, raised at the November 2007 church meeting, ‘What sort of church do we want to be?’ we set out to discover what it means to be a healthy church and to see if there were any health issues at BBC we needed to address.

Following a seven-sermon series on the marks of a healthy church we undertook a day-long exercise to evaluate our own progress towards good health as a church. The meeting was very encouraging, with 20 people involved. The purpose of the exercise was to look at each of the seven marks and ask how we thought we were doing in each of these areas.

Health issues

Having considered each of the seven marks we asked three questions: (a) what were our strengths, (b) what areas did we feel needed work and (c) where did we see things differently. In the first category we felt that we were an outward-looking community that was open and welcoming to all (marks 2, 5 & 6), though in all three of these marks there was at least one person who said these areas were either weak and holding us back or that there were only a few signs of them (ie the lowest two scores).

At the other end of the scale we saw ourselves as needing to work on facing the costs of change and growth and become a more faith energized, God seeking fellowship (marks 1, 3 & 4). Again, this was not a unanimous view. Indeed, the widest difference of opinion within the group was over our willingness to face the cost of change and our seeking to find out what God wants.

While we agreed that we did not want to neglect our strengths it was the three areas needing work that we wanted to address. We also noted that these three marks ('seeking to find out what God wants', 'energized by faith' and 'facing the cost of change and growth') were intertwined and that, for example, change was easier to bear when we knew it was God's will.

Because we ran out of time at the first meeting we met again a few days later to look at these three issues. Those present were asked to join any of three groups, each looking at those areas identified as 'needs working on'. These three groups worked separately but came to a remarkably similar set of conclusions. In broad terms, each group agreed that:

- it was vital for us to discover the mind of Christ for this church.
- we should find appropriate ways to explore our faith more deeply.
- it was important to develop and communicate a coherent vision for this church.

A strategy for the future

Out of the whole process a number of specific recommendations were made. They can be grouped under four headings.

Prayer

- Active encouragement for people to involve themselves in the prayer life of this church.
- Exploring different ways of praying.
- Gaining a deeper understanding of prayer as discovering God's will and learning to see things from his perspective.

Worship

- Experiencing God's love.
- Hearing God's voice.
- Engaging with God's word.

Church community

- Learning to 'be' not simply to 'do'.
- Building relationships within the fellowship.
- Finding opportunities to put our faith into practice by serving God and one another.

Leadership

- The task of leadership is to enable the church to explore their faith and grow in it, not to control.
- Leadership has a special role of developing and communicating vision.
- Leadership needs to both manage and review change.

Actions

Some practical suggestions were made. Chief among these were:

- do the basics well, with special attention to the Sunday morning service
- have some specific teaching on prayer
- look again at the corporate prayer life of the church and explore new and different approaches to prayer
- consider the possibility of holding a Lay Witness Weekend
- in everything – put Jesus at the centre

What next?

These findings were discussed at the April church leaders' meeting and again at the May Deacons' meeting before being presented to the May church meeting. This report is part of the answer to the question, 'What sort of church do we want to be?' and the leaders hope it will be useful in helping us to both grow as a church and keep us on track in the months to come.

At the next few church meetings, and in many less formal settings, we will discuss the issues raised more fully and look at ways of putting these things into practice.

The Leadership Team

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