

T. E. A. C. H.

May, June, July

Provided by the Christian Education Dept.

Volume 6 Number 2

NUTS AND BOLTS FOR A HEALTHY CHURCH

By Dan Harrison
C.E. Chairman

Have you ever wondered why some churches flourish and others languish? Have you ever been frustrated because you knew you were working harder and were more faithful to the things of the faith than someone else but they seemed to be getting better results for their efforts? There are some mysteries to the kingdom of God that are beyond comprehension or explanation but many things can be figured out if we take the time to really think about them.

I will forever be thankful to Dr. Dan Tipton for exposing me to systems thinking. Understanding some of the basic component pieces of a systems approach to ministry has enhanced my efforts in the kingdom immeasurably. In its simplest form, system thinking deals with inputs, transformation, and outputs. There is health in the organism or organization only to the extent that these three maintain a measure of balance.

What in the world does all that have to do with growing a healthy church? The easiest way I know to explain it in a church context is to say that for a church to be healthy there must be a flow of people into the church, lives must be changed by the gospel, and those who make decisions must be taught and empowered to live as disciples of Christ Jesus who make a difference for Him. Without a balance between these three ministries, health is only a dream.

It takes a great deal of focus and effort to keep each of these things in balance. I remember early in my ministry when I would preach evangelistic messages week after week in spite of the fact that there were no seekers in our services. As a church family we had gotten so busy taking care of each other that we had forgotten about those without Christ who were just beyond the walls of our meeting place. For a church to avoid introversion and stagnation there must be an intentional plan for reaching out to those who don't yet know Jesus. If we go to sleep at the wheel in this area we can be around lost people all day without ever really

being aware of their presence. Even worse we can begin to view them as the enemy to be avoided at all costs.

Healthy churches realize that lost people matter to God and they make it a priority to expose them to the good news of the gospel in as many ways as possible. That may begin by simply building a relationship with them, earning their trust and gaining their confidence by being a friend in time of need. Once a relationship has developed and a line of open communication has been established the sharing of faith can be a very normal and natural thing to do. Many people will follow a path of faith development that is incremental, coming together a piece at a time. It usually begins through contact with a friend or family member who knows Christ, then through the influence of that person they gain exposure to the church, and finally through the ministries of the church they experience the power of the gospel and a personal relationship with Jesus. (cont. pg. 2)

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People who make decisions for Christ must then be cultivated and nurtured in their faith development until they are taught to constantly obey the truth of God's Word. As the Holy Spirit brings truth to bear upon the needy areas of their heart and life, another crisis moment of decision is reached. Will the individual live for the flesh or the Spirit? A life that manifests the fruit of the Holy Spirit is dependent upon total surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Without this level of surrender, consistent manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit is not possible. Faithfulness and fruitfulness will always be in short supply in the un sanctified life. Discipling relationships are ESSENTIAL if people are going to continue with Christ.

Believers living a Spirit filled, Spirit controlled life cannot help but make an impact for the Lord. When we love people the way Jesus loved people it will be impossible to live without making a difference in the lives of others. The Holy Spirit graces each of us with gifts to be used for the glory of God. As these gifts are surrendered and utilized God produces fruit through us for His glory.

Churches are healthy when they reach out to people who need Jesus.

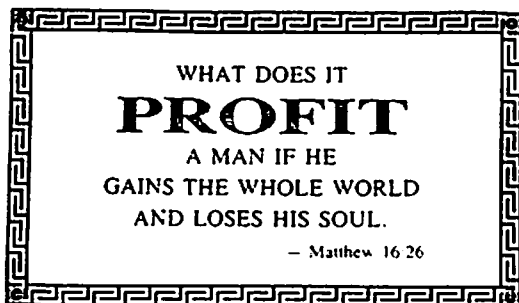
Churches are healthy when they bring people into relationship with Christ.

Churches are healthy when they disciple those who choose Christ.

Churches are healthy when their people experience holiness of heart.

Churches are healthy when spiritual gifts are properly used for God's glory.

All of these things are interdependent. If any link in the chain breaks, the entire chain is impacted. We need to strengthen the links of our outreach to people who need Jesus, to intensify our passion for their salvation, to renew our determination to help them become obedient disciples who are enjoying a Spirit-filled life where their spiritual gifts are making a difference and bringing glory to God. These are the nuts and bolts of a healthy church.



The ABC'S of a Healthy Church

A Healthy Church...we've heard so much about this lately...model church, conventions, seminars, etc. What is a healthy church? I'm sure that as you are asked that question many thoughts come to your mind...some formulated by outside thinking and then I'm sure that you could give some of your own experience related answers. One thing that is not synonymous with the idea of a "healthy" church is that it is a "perfect" church. There are no perfect churches! Healthy churches continue to have aches and pains, that is normal! Many times we need to go to the Physician for healing and he will give us the direction for recovery. If you're waiting to find a perfect church without any problems, you'll have to wait until you reach heaven!

Years ago I had the opportunity to work as an EMT and then many years as a Paramedic, the experiences and knowledge I learned will always be a treasured part of my life. One thing that you learn every early in the EMT career is the ABC's. These are not the same principles we all learned in preschool, but they are a very important evaluation of how healthy your patient is. If you and your patient do not have a grasp on the ABC's then there is no need to worry about the rest of the evaluation. What are the ABC's? How can they tell us if what we have is a healthy church?

First and foremost is **A**irway - Are we open to the moving of the Spirit of God? Can we recognize that it is Him that is breathing on and within us? Is the Word of God being accurately preached and spoken within the body? Are we responding to Him by being open to Him, and catching the fresh breath He is giving us? If these passages are obstructed then we need to make a change - maybe do a repositioning and evaluate again if we are open to Him. If these passages are blocked there is no reason to go on to the next step, until we have an *Open Airway!* A healthy church is one that is open to receive God and not blocked with foreign objects.

The next step in evaluating the healthiness is **B**reathing - Are we a living and a breathing church? Or are we a dead church that has just been taking up space, waiting to be buried? Is there energy and movement within our body, or are we just going through the motions? We can have all the oxygen that is needed-it's there for our use, abundantly! It can be freely received, pumped in with a little assistance or forced. But what you do is important! Many of us have made the mission statements, wrote the goals, received the insights and then done nothing!! We need to be the body that not only inhales but also that exhales. There needs to be movement of that air. A healthy church is one that receives and does! Faith without works is dead! Or as Rich Mullins said, *"It's like a screen door on a submarine."*

The last part of the essential basic assessment is **Circulation** - It's always important to see if there is blood getting to all parts of the body. How is our pulse? Is it fast? Slow? Weak? Steady? Strong? These are very important factors in the evaluation of a healthy church. What are we doing? Is our heart really beating, are we really effective? A healthy church will recognize the problem and take care of it before it goes flat line (No Pulse). Also in the area of circulation...is there a wound that needs tending to? Something that needs immediate attention? Some wounds can be taken care of with a simple bandage, others need pressure applied while yet others need drastic measures- if the health of the body is not to be compromised. There are rare times when a tourniquet needs to be applied and the part needs to be cut-off. It seems very drastic, very harsh, but the life of the body may depend upon it. It needs to be taken care of and then the body may heal and recover.

Just as ABC's are very important to the body, they too can help us to evaluate the health of a church. How does your church rate on the basic assessment? Are the main factors present for the continued good health of the body? If they are intact, working properly, and checked often - you have the potential to be on your way to producing and maintaining a healthy church



Frank E. Skies
Wellsville Christian Fellowship,
C.C.C.U.

Jump Starting Your Sunday School

By Bruce Morrison
Lincoln Heights C.C.C.U.

We're hearing different comments about Sunday School ministries across the land now. Some leaders feel that the old fashioned version of Sunday school is a traditional washout which needs a proper burial and then we can move on to a more contemporary style of church outreach. Then there are others who plead for an overhaul of the present system which tinkers with style and coffee and donuts while using new brands of curriculum to draw in the less faithful attender.

My article is not written to add flame to the fire of this debate, but it is in fact addressing the needs for a revival in both truth and image for our floundering churches and Sunday schools. It is my fear that whether we overhaul or bury, there is a much deeper problem that must be addressed. We have lost

ground in our Sunday schools and discipleship programs because we have grown apathetic about their importance, like a lifeguard who would fall asleep on his white wooden tower. That spirit of apathy has brought down several key elements needed to succeed in bringing Christian maturity to our people. Those elements needing revival are:

1. **Relevancy** - For too long we have been placing before our brothers and sisters a plate of tasteless, valueless lessons that wouldn't help anyone in a minor crisis, let alone a major one. Our discipleship must involve the eternal and relevant Word of God that gives every believer a weapon to win the battles they will face that coming week. Remember that Paul in Romans 1:16 told us about the gospel being the power of God. We need that power now!

2. **Intensity** - Many teachers and facilitators have reached such a place of self-confidence that they feel there isn't anything new in the Word that they haven't heard. But the fact is, that no man can boast of total comprehension when it comes to the Word of God. We must get back to digging for ourselves again, so that our students may learn from our blessings of new knowledge.

3. **Charity** - Our classrooms must become a place of love and acceptance for every visitor and enrollee that enters. Ultimately our purpose of gathering is for the evangelization of the lost and the building of believers, and that cannot be accomplished without the demonstration of love and support in each class. What would happen if every student or person in our places of worship were made to feel wanted and appreciated this next week? Remember, love never fails.

4. **Doctrinal Unity** - To insure the effectiveness of our church's ministry we must accomplish doctrinal unity concerning the important issues in scripture. Those issues are given in sermons week after week, but it is in the classroom setting that many find the time to respond and develop their knowledge through dialog.

5. **Eternity** - Every leader and Bible teacher cannot lose their urgency when it comes to their ministry. Eternity is at stake and spiritual warfare is eminent, and they are the chosen strategist to get their soldiers through the dangers of this world and into heaven. It isn't a guilt ploy, it is a reality check! We heaven. We have been called to represent God, and God still loves people more than anything!



From Reviving



Comes Repotting

You know you didn't start it. Though you did pray, "Lord, revive our church and begin with me." With fasting, praying and an obedient spirit, God does begin a revival; of love for Him, of unity with believers, and of passion for the lost. He begins the revival in individuals. Then the fire spreads. Gains momentum. Effects the whole church. Impacts the community!

It has been three weeks since the closing day of our scheduled revival services. However, last night, what should have been a normal Sunday evening Church Extension service, was an explosion of praises in song and testimony. People are reporting victories, opportunities to witness, and answers to prayers. One brother said, "I had a terrible week, but I choose to stand and give God the praise!" As he abruptly sat down, the congregation erupted into a clap offering to the Lord.

Our Church Extension President shared the total of the Palm Sunday offering for Church Extension. It is far more than we have ever given before. Then she told us that, for our next month's meeting, she would have hearts with street names, of a two mile area around our church, for us to "adopt-a-street." This will be the beginning strategy of our "Re-PLANT" Taskforce. We are going to re-pot Sandhill Church of Christ in Christian Union. Sandhill is at the northern edge of Lebanon, Pennsylvania. This area has largely changed since Mark Allwein planted it here thirty-one years ago. Not only have people come and gone, there are also 2 new housing developments that have been built. Most of these people don't know we exist here. We're going to use the principals that we learned from "Churches Planting Churches" a Robert Logan and Steven Odne video series to do a trial run right here in our own community. We're believing this revitalization experience will launch us into becoming a church planting church.

This article is supposed to be about REVIVAL, not Church Extension, right? Well, our speaker, Rev. Bob Flint, from Marysville, Ohio taught us a new concept. His ministry to us was a *Revivalist* not an *Evangelist*. God used him to bring powerful, yet practical messages to revive us. Now God is using us to be the evangelists.

THE MAKING OF A REVIVAL



So how did all this get started? Six weeks before Easter, during the Lent season, a number of our congregation committed to participate in "Pray U.S.A. 98 - 40 days of Prayer & Fasting". Most planned to fast one meal a day to pray for revival in America to begin in our church and community. Others fasted one full day a week. Some fasted TV viewing-time to spend in prayer. Some gave up sweets and or caffeine. Week after week, we heard reports of spiritual growth or a great burden for the lost as a result of the fasting and praying.

Our revival services had been scheduled, at least a year prior, for March 23 - March 29, 1998. This fell at the end of a five Sunday month, which we had designated as "EVANGELISM" month in our Model Church Year Plan. Our evangelism theme was "Circle of Love." This would help us bring people in our "circles of love," into God's "circle of love." Our circles of love included: "Circle Our Children/Youth with Love" - March 1; "The Circle of Friends" - March 8; "The Co-Worker's Circle" - March 15; "Circle the Hood" (Neighbors) - March 22; and "the Family Circle" March 29. We collected five names, addresses and phone numbers: one from each person's circle of acquaintance to develop our prayer and prospect list. We prayed, invited and each week saw a number of visitors and return visitors, as we followed up.

This is supposed to be an article about REVIVAL, not an outreach program, right? Well, this may be a "chicken-or-egg-first" question. Does revival come first or does obedience come first! All we know is, that in our case, out of obedience came a great revival that is energizing more obedience!

On several Friday's during our Lent fast, a few ladies gathered at the church for a prayer and fast from noon to three. These were rich times of personal preparation, intercession for the church, and prayer support for our coming speaker and singers. Finally, on Friday, March 20, at 5:00 P.M., we began to observe a 24-hour fast. At 7:00 P.M., our revival began. Our singers weren't scheduled until Sunday morning and our speaker didn't start preaching until Monday night, but revival had truly begun. With eleven adults and three children in the nursery, and about 10% of our congregation; we participated in a "Concert of Prayer."

After a brief time of preparing our hearts in *Worship through Song*, we went on to *Worship through Confession*. To help us get honest with God, we used the resource sheet, "A Personal Evaluation", from the **Experiencing REVIVAL** notebook by Thom Rainer and Michael Silva. Each of us took this sheet and our Bibles and dispersed throughout the sanctuary to get alone with God. During the next hour, we wept and prayed for forgiveness as God convicted our hearts. To close

out the time of confession, we gathered around the altar. We confessed our faults to each other and prayed for each other, that we would be healed (James 5:16a). What a precious time, as God broke our hearts for ourselves and for each other.

After being broken by our own unworthiness or sin, we refocused on God's forgiveness, faithfulness and mercy in a time of *Worship through Adoration and Thanksgiving*. This restored our confidence to "come boldly before the Throne of Grace" (Hebrews 4:16) to intercede for personal, corporate, local, and national revival in a time of *Worship through Petition and Supplication*. For over two and a half hours, we had done the work of prayer. People who had come to the "Concert of Prayer" weary from a hard week on the job, had their strength renewed and had been "lifted up on the wings of eagles." (Isaiah 40:31) Expectation hung in the air. We knew REVIVAL had begun.

Every evening, at 6:00 P.M. people were praying around the altar. At 7:00 P.M., we sang praises, were ministered to with music by "Mended Heart". We sat on the edge of our seats to take in God's Word from Rev. Bob Flint. Every night there were seekers. All that's been told is just the bare facts. The details of how God began a revival on Sandhill couldn't be contained in this newsletter.

MAINTAINING A REVIVAL



Sunday night, a week after the conclusion of our scheduled revival services, we looked to the pamphlet that we were using during "*Pray U.S.A. '98 - 40 Days of Prayer & Fasting*" for some guidelines to help us focus on how to maintain a personal revival. Following are the things that Bill Bright's (Campus Crusade for Christ) pamphlet 7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting & Prayer suggests:

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any unconfessed sin in your life.
2. Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you. Make restitution where God leads.
3. Examine your motives in every word and deed. Ask the Lord to search and cleanse your heart daily.
4. Ask the Holy Spirit to guard your walk against complacency and mediocrity.
5. Praise and give thanks to God continually in all ways on all days, regardless of your circumstances.
6. Refuse to obey your carnal (worldly) nature (Galatians 5:16, 17).
7. Surrender your life to Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Develop utter dependence on Him with total submission and humility.
8. Study the attributes of God.
9. Hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5:6).

In addition to this, we agreed to do three things to maintain corporate revival. First, we will be responsible for each other. We will do this by taking time to ask, "How are you doing with your decision or commitment made during revival?" We will pray for each other. We will encourage each other. Second, we will be vulnerable with each other. We will share our struggles in our discipleship groups, Sunday School classes, or during testimony time (whenever appropriate). Thirdly, we will be accountable to each other. We will be willing to give an account of how we are doing. These will produce a spirit of caring and loving: a great bonding in the family of God at Sandhill C.C.C.U..

Taking care of ourselves and our own is a must. However, the guarantee that we will continue to be a REVIVED church is in the fruit-bearing. We are to bear fruit that will remain (John 15:16). Evangelism resulting in discipling new believers to be lifestyle-evangelists will keep revival fires burning. Then we'll have to be a church planting church because we're land-locked. No, we won't relocate, because we're convinced that there should always be a C.C.C.U. church on Sandhill. The "want-to-relocate-ers" will be a core group we'll send out to plant a new church!

You know you didn't start it, but you had a part, "...All that we have accomplished You have done for us." (Isaiah 26:13)

Rev. Martha Adams is a pastor of the Sandhill C.C.C.U. in Lebanon, Pa.

If you are interested in any of the resources mentioned in this article please contact the C.E. Department in Winchester, Ohio at (937) 695-0025.

A prayer for renewal

Free me this day, O Lord,
from all fear of the future,
from all anxiety about tomorrow,
from all bitterness towards anyone,
from all cowardice in face of danger,
from all laziness in the face of work,
from all failure before opportunity,
from all weakness when thy power is at hand.

But fill me

with Love that knows no barrier,
with Sympathy that reaches to all,
with Courage that cannot be shaken,
with Faith strong enough for the darkness,
with Strength sufficient for my tasks,
with Loyalty to thy Kingdom's goal,
with Wisdom to meet life's complexities,
with Power to lift me to thee.

Be Thou with me for another day, and use me as Thou wilt.
For Christ's sake I pray. Amen.

—Wallace Fridy

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1998 CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CONVENTION

We have a great task ahead of us as we race toward the year 2000. WOW, a new millennium, are you ready? We need to get ready and the Christian Education Convention desires to help us to get ready.

Coming into a new century alerts us to the fact that our churches and Christian Education is going through a metamorphosis of change. Let's get ready for the new millennium so we can help those God has placed into our responsibility. Reaching, discipling and leading to maturity will be an awesome task.

The church has lost a generation of people. We need to strive to share God's grace and mercy. An acceptance has to be offered to those who are coming into the church, as these new people truly know nothing about the church or our loving Lord.

A recent story from my church tells it best. As our church makes the effort to be accepting and relevant, a lady shared with me concerning her neighbor who came and

made a visit just before Easter. This neighbor's son asked for a calendar. She was taken aback, but met the demands of this unusual request by her kindergarten son. He asked her to show him on the calendar where Good Friday was and to tell him about this special day. It had to be special because they were not having school. The mother remembering her Sunday School teaching shared with her son that Jesus died on the cross for his sins and the sins of the world. This mother had stopped going to church when she was in her teens. Her son had been to church very few times. He looked at his mother with astonishment and with a sincere heart said, "Mommy, Jesus died for me? When did He do that, nobody told me?" The mother ran to her neighbor, who attends our church, and with tears gave recognition that she needs to get back to church and take her son. Her fear - she didn't know if the church would accept her.

We need to get ready. I believe if we build the house they will come.

1998 Christian Education Convention
September 19, 1998
Falth Memorial Church, Lancaster, OH
"You and the Coming Millennium"

Pastor Mike Holbrook