

DISTINCTIVES of a HEALTHY CHURCH



Bible Fellowship Church



History

In 2013 the Executive Board of the Bible Fellowship Church (BFC) established a 16-point “20/20 Vision” for its denomination. Under the leadership of Executive Director David T. Allen this vision sought a goal of 75 particular BFC churches, where 95% report a healthy status. The BFC Health Committee in turn took this vision and prioritized efforts to assist its pastors and church leaders in promoting healthy congregations for the advance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those priorities include:

- Providing ongoing contact with each BFC church through its pastors and delegates
- Appointing surrogate elders to assist churches in need
- Developing materials that define healthy church distinctives
- Assisting with church evaluations
- Appointing a part-time Pastor of Church Health

This booklet examines the benchmarks, i.e. distinctives in successful ministry which foster a healthy church. The BFC believes that church leaders who adopt and develop these distinctive qualities in their local congregations are taking great steps toward the establishment of healthy churches both locally and denominationally. Once established, that health will set the trajectory for effective Bible Fellowship Church ministry well beyond 2020.

Introduction

As stated in article 18-2 of the Articles of Faith of the Bible Fellowship Church, the goal of every BFC church is outlined in a three-fold purpose to:

1. **Worship God** (John 4:23-24; 1 Peter 2:5,9)
2. **Edify the saints** (1 Corinthians 12:7,11)
3. **Evangelize the world** (Matthew 28:18-20)

In order to accomplish these purposes the following biblical distinctives are to be vitally established in the Spirit in every BFC church, allowing for cultural and contextual differences. Each distinctive also includes questions to help church leaders evaluate and determine how prevalent it exists within their church.

Distinctive 1: Biblical and Practical Theology

Doctrinal teaching (BFC Articles of Faith, BFC Biblical Principles for Living, systematic theology, biblical theology) and topical teaching (evangelism, marriage, parenting, etc.) should always be provided at various church venues including Sunday worship, Sunday School, small groups, and weekday services, along with opportunities for scripture memorization such as Bible studies and AWANA for children (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Psalm 119:9-11).

Questions:

1. How does your particular church include teaching the BFC Articles of Faith and Biblical Principles for Living in its regular training of the flock?
2. What opportunities does your church provide for its members to regularly read God's Word, memorize it, and meditate on it?
3. Name the topics and series that your church has had in its teaching venues over the past year. Is there a comprehensive plan for how your church is teaching 'the whole counsel of God' as outlined in God's Word?

Distinctive 2: Christ-centered Worship

The form of worship is important and it should be God-honoring. The BFC believes Jesus Christ should be the first and foremost object of our Spirit-led worship (Psalm 100). Corporate worship services should emanate from lives that have been genuinely transformed by the power of the gospel (John 4:23-24). Healthy churches seek to have inspiring and authentic worship that glorifies God and engages the hearts and minds of God's people. Healthy corporate worship should also create a culture which promotes life-change where God's people love Christ completely and seek to serve Him more. People in healthy churches adopt a lifestyle of worship which is most evident through their daily lives of obedience to Christ and His Word.

Questions:

1. What worship service elements characterize your particular church? Are there any practices in your worship service that distract attendees from worshipping God? What are they?
2. What changes have you heard about or seen in the lives of the people of your church as they participate in corporate worship?

Distinctive 3: Evangelism & World Missions

All authority has been given to Jesus Christ and He commands that we make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20) beginning with those who are near and also reaching out to the rest of the world (Acts 1:8). Healthy churches actively participate in both world and home missions, seeking to minister the Gospel to all ethnic people groups in its target area. They reach their local communities with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, serve as the presence of Christ in that community, and engage in various ministries of mercy and justice to those in need.

Questions:

1. In what ways are you participating in Christ's mission for His Church to preach the Gospel and make disciples?
2. How is your particular church reaching its "...Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth"? Is your church providing opportunities to train and share the Gospel?
3. Because baptism is a biblical mark of one's conversion, are you regularly having baptisms in your church? How many have you had this past year or two?
4. In what ways are you intentionally ministering to the downtrodden in your community?

Distinctive 4: Fellowship and Love

Each BFC church is to promote fellowship and ‘one-anothering’ in its congregation. This is typically accomplished outside of Sunday morning worship activities in a variety of other venues and establishes a sense of genuine Christian community and family. Biblical examples include exhortations to: love one another (John 13:34), be affectionate and loving towards one another (Romans 12:10a), honor one another (Romans 12:10b), build up one another (Romans 14:19), admonish one another (Romans 15:14), bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2), forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32), and be hospitable to one another (1 Peter 4:9).

Questions:

1. In what ways do you promote times of fellowship and ‘one-anothering’ as outlined above?
2. In what ways does your church talk about itself in terms of a family and community? Give examples of ways that people are thinking and speaking in this way.
3. How do you weave people into the fabric of your church?

(For more information on this topic, see “SIDE BY SIDE” by Ed Welch and “INSTRUMENTS IN THE REDEEMER’S HANDS” by Paul David Tripp.)

Distinctive 5: God's Presence

Without the presence of God men are powerless and can do nothing of eternal value (John 15:5). The Church, like its individual members, is desperately dependent upon God's presence. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit the Church is transformed into Christ's likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18) as a bride being made ready for her husband (Revelation 19:7) and equipped to fulfill the mission to which she has been called (Ephesians 2:10). Proofs of God's presence in the life of a church include:

- Increasing evidence of the fruit of the Spirit among all members (Galatians 5:22)
- Unselfish use of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-10)
- A continuing witness of transformed lives through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Questions:

1. Starting with 'love', how is the fruit of the Spirit being seen on a daily and weekly basis in your church in the individuals who are attending?
2. Consider how God's Spirit has been at work in the life of your church over the past year. Where have you seen Him working?

Examples:

- a. Has God given clear guidance and direction for a decision that needed to be made?
 - b. Has God answered a specific prayer request in a specific way?
 - c. Has God given an obvious ability or resources or power to obey Him to complete a task or responsibility?
 - d. Has God shown his special protection and care?
3. How do you think those outside the Church are viewing your particular congregation? What might they say about what is happening in the life of the church and/or the lives of the members and attenders?

*“And we all, who with unveiled faces
contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being
transformed into his image with
ever-increasing glory, which comes
from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

—2 Corinthians 3:18

Distinctive 6: Leadership and Church Government

The BFC believes in a plurality of godly elders to spiritually lead churches. These are men who meet the qualifications as outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-3, along with fully submitting to and aligning with the Bible and the Articles of Faith of the Bible Fellowship Church. Their responsibilities should include:

- Provide the church with a biblically based mission and vision and how it will be carried out.
- Teach the church the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27-28).
- Model the Christian life and service for the church.
- Guard sound doctrine.
- Tend and care for church members and attenders.
- Discipline the church as needed.
- Watch and intentionally raise up godly men and women for biblically appropriate positions of leadership. A biblically qualified board of deacons shall also assist the elders by overseeing the physical needs and service of the church.

Questions:

1. As you look at your particular church, do you see the church being spiritually led by the 'plurality of godly elders, along with the physical needs being met by the deacons?' Why or why not?
2. What is your church doing to intentionally raise up godly men and women? Does your church have a plan for training young men and women who will someday come alongside and eventually replace those who are leading when they can no longer lead? Describe the plan.
3. How is the vision for your particular church going to be carried out?

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Distinctive 7: Making Disciples of Jesus Christ

The BFC is committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ and recognizes there are many venues in which discipleship takes place. Although each venue is different, the goal is always the same – making mature disciples who will continue to disciple others (Matthew 10:25a, 2 Timothy 2:2). The Apostle Paul understood this truth when he wrote, “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete and mature in Christ.” (Colossians 1:28). Therefore, churches are to be deliberate and intentional about reproducing disciples. This effort is a life-long pursuit and must involve believers of all ages – from the nursery to the ‘senior saint’. Although biblical literacy is an essential component, the focus of discipleship extends further towards character change and reproduction. A healthy church creates and maintains a culture of Bible study which fosters such transformation.

Questions:

1. How do you define ‘making disciples’ in your church?
2. As you look at how you get together in small groups for teaching, fellowship, and building up the body, how do you believe you are doing at ‘older men teaching younger men, older women teaching younger women’? In what ways are your members investing themselves in the lives of others to help them also become disciple-makers?
3. What groups have worked the best for your particular church when it comes to teaching and discipling? Are there one-on-one relationships for the purpose of teaching/mentoring going on in your church?
4. What is your plan for integrating new members and discipling those who have committed to being a part of the body?
5. Deliberate and intentional disciple-making includes planting new churches. Does your church have a plan to plant or to be involved with church-planting? If so, describe your plan.

Distinctive 8: Membership and Stewardship

The BFC encourages membership and stewardship that provides oversight, shepherding, and care for each member. It also includes the full opportunity to use one's God-given gifts and resources to equip and build up the body of believers (Ephesians 4:1-16).

Questions:

1. How often does your church speak on the importance of membership? What is your plan?
2. How are you encouraging the use of each member's gifts and resources to build up the body?

With regard to the Lord's Table, do you regularly observe it? How often and why have you decided to do it that often? Explain in greater detail how your church celebrates the Lord's Supper.

Distinctive 9: Prayer

God's people and God's church are commanded to pray at all times (1 Thessalonians 5:17), declaring their relationship and dependence upon God along with conforming to His will in all things (Matthew 26:39). Prayer acknowledges a reliance on divine enablement for all ministry (John 15:5). A healthy church encourages prayer from individuals and provides opportunities for corporate prayer.

Questions:

1. In what ways does your church integrate individual and corporate prayer into its daily life?
2. How are you promoting a habit of daily prayer in your personal and family life?

Distinctive 10: Preaching and Teaching

The BFC is passionately committed to the faithful expositional preaching and teaching that explains the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27) and centers on Jesus Christ and His gospel (Colossians 1:28, 1 Corinthians 1:23). The pastor applies it to the life of his people by the power of the Holy Spirit with the goal of saving his listeners and transforming himself and his flock into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). The BFC is committed to the faithful exposition of God's word whether biblical book by book, verse by verse, or a topical sermon or series (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

Questions:

1. Do you or does your pastor preach in the ways outlined above? Why or why not?
2. How might you be able to help make this way of preaching and teaching more commonplace in your particular church?
3. Are the people encouraged and provided opportunities to pray for the pastor's anointing to preach the Word? If so, how?

*"...I will build my church,
and the gates of Hades
shall not prevail against it."*

— Matthew 16:18



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

This booklet is a publication of the Church Health
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