



Healthy churches have several common characteristics. The Rev. Dr. Robin Scott (District Superintendent with the North Alabama Conference of the UMC, has used these characteristics to grow healthy churches for over twenty years. These healthy characteristics were approved by the Bishop and Cabinet in 2014 for use as a guide by the church health team. These characteristics are the benchmarks used by the Church Health team as well as North Alabama Conference District Superintendents to determine the overall health of a church.

- 1. Healthy churches reach unchurched pre-Christian people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**
This is exemplified by professions of faith and baptisms. When asked if the church reaches out to un-churched persons, the answer is with affirmation, citing events that bring the church in contact with people who do not attend their church. Healthy things reproduce and for the healthy church that means new converts.
- 2. Healthy churches help new converts grow in their faith and relationship with Christ and other Christians.**
They see discipleship as their mission. Few churches have staff persons dedicated to discipleship. A healthy church is not as concerned with increasing membership as in making disciples.
- 3. Healthy churches emphasize gift based ministries that provide services to the church family and community. Healthy churches assimilate members (existing and new) and reduce attrition.**
In Healthy churches, nominations for ministry involvement and leadership are based upon a person's gifts, passion and call. This is difficult unless someone is dedicated to the discipleship needs of the congregation. Healthy churches have an understanding of the concept of for all believers, not just persons seeking ordination or licensing.
- 4. Healthy churches help people become a witness of God's grace and love, sending them out into the ministry of the broader church.**
Helping others grow in their faith is the job of all believers. This spiritual calling is taught, emphasized and practiced. People hear and answer the call of God upon their lives, resulting in candidates for ministry, missionaries in the field and servants into the community for Christ.
- 5. Healthy churches believe in and emphasize prayer.**
Churches understand that the ability to bring about Kingdom results depends upon God's power and presence. They seek God's will, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else.
- 6. Healthy churches hold membership and leadership expectations that lead to extravagantly generous stewardship and service.**
Members are held to a different standard than are attendees and leaders are held to an even greater standard. Membership vows are taken with great sacredness and seriousness. The ability to be a leader is given only to those who keep these vows.
- 7. Healthy churches expect and hold members accountable for growth in personal and social holiness.**
This standard is part of our heritage and part of the New Testament church. We do not walk this journey alone. This is most often manifested in small group experiences.
- 8. Healthy Churches are not derailed by crisis and conflict.**
Healthy churches build relationships with one another through open communication, conflict resolution and forgiveness with one another.
- 9. Healthy churches have inspiring and transformative worship.**
Each service is an opportunity to reach the un-reached and an opportunity to disciple and grow those that have experienced God's justifying grace. Worship is inspiring, in that it challenges persons in the worship service to "move on to perfection." Each service is transformative as the congregation is given the opportunity to indicate a "yes" to God's call upon their life.

10. **Healthy churches emphasize spiritual formation throughout all aspects of the Church's Structure and Ministry.**
Spiritual formation is based on the belief that God always has more for us and that every team in the church is about ministry and service. Spiritual formation begins with children and is included with each age group. Spiritual formation takes place not just in Missions and Evangelism, but includes the Board of Trustees, Finance Committee, Staff Parish Committee and all other committees and activities of the church.

11. **Healthy Churches have systems in place that track: participation in spiritual growth opportunities, recipients and providers of ministries and unmet spiritual, physical and emotional needs.**
Healthy churches are aware of past service, present opportunities and future hopes. Such record keeping facilitates the church to offer opportunities for its congregants. Healthy churches care for all persons, those yet to be reached as well as those already reached. Layers of care are provided by both clergy and laity. Each layer is valid and authentic.

12. **Healthy churches transform their communities and freely share ministry insights with other churches.**
Healthy churches are active in changing their community and the lives of persons within the community. Healthy churches work with other churches ministry partners to grow the Kingdom. Their objective is to spread the gospel of Christ and realize that this is achieved both inside and outside the walls of the local congregation. This facilitates connection with other churches in our conference as well as other denominations (ecumenical ministries).