



How Healthy Is My Church?

Assess Your Church Health In 7 Categories
To Chart A Pathway Out of Decline



AS A LEADER IN YOUR CHURCH, you feel called to help the church away from decline and towards a greater sense of God's mission and purpose. In order to do this, you know there are things that need to change, and you can foresee the journey you'd like to take the church on. But doing so will be costly. You are already losing members. Few grasp the vision. Conflicts threaten relationships. Key leaders are losing steam. And you understand that any changes you make, even if they're for the better, will have to be carefully calculated. The big issue you're running into is whether this church has enough health to weather the changes associated with revitalization, or whether you're better off helping them peacefully come to terms with their inevitable decline.

Cyclical Full Circle works with church leaders seeking to revitalize declining congregations. All of them seem to have the same question: is my church healthy enough to save, or should we call it quits? Do we have enough "gas in the tank" to take the church on a revitalizing journey, or should we coast to the next rest stop and call a tow?

As a leader at your church, you might be facing similar concerns. How will you know if you have the reserves to go the distance? How do you know how healthy your church is? A faithful response can be to engage a process of assessment and discernment to discover more about your church health and what pathways may be available to you.

The first step is to take the How Healthy Is My Church? Quiz. If you haven't yet done so, please pause here and go take the quiz at www.cyclicalfullcircle.com. It takes about 5 minutes, and it will give you the insight you need to have valuable conversations as a leadership team.

The second step is to have your whole leadership team take the same quiz. That way, you can see where there is agreement and where there is difference on the team. This may be even more crucial information; if there is agreement around an area of weakness, voila! It's now a strength.

The third step is to review your results. After you've taken your quiz, you will get an email with your results in seven categories, which we will list below. These seven categories of health will help you get a clear picture on not just attendance and giving numbers (which are helpful), but also the spiritual vitality of your congregation, which we've found is much more indicative of a church's overall health. We've also included some prompts and questions to help your team better understand how God might be calling you to move forward.

The fourth step is to begin working with your team to discern a pathway away from decline. As you study your results, you'll have questions about what they mean for your church and what to do next. On the last page we will give you some suggestions of what you can do from here to lead your church out of decline and into God's mission.

Sincerely,

Rob Douglas

Director of Cyclical Full Circle





Incarnational Disciple-Making

I AM REMINDED OF YOUR SINCERE FAITH, A FAITH THAT LIVED FIRST IN YOUR GRANDMOTHER LOIS AND YOUR MOTHER EUNICE AND NOW, I AM SURE, LIVES IN YOU.

-2 TIMOTHY 1:5

Healthy churches, compelled by mission, move beyond the walls of their buildings in order to make new disciples. Discipleship means people of all ages are being formed for living out the way of Jesus among their neighbors, promoting justice and equity and healing division, suffering, and oppression. Discipleship can take many different forms, but every healthy church will have a clear way that they disciple people.

Some signs you are strong in this category

- You have a clear disciple-making plan that has been contextually discerned
- Every member understands the disciple-making plan
- Key leaders are engaging the disciple-making plan
- Those who have been involved in the disciple-making plan report improved spiritual depth and missional practices

Some things to consider if you are not strong in this category

- Ask your church leadership how they will prioritize disciple-making
- Aim for trying small experiments in disciple-making and adapt as you go
- Commit to practicing the disciple-making experiments yourself, along with a few other key leaders, to road test it before you get the whole congregation on board
- Order copies of *The Missional Disciple-Making Handbook* for your leadership team to get step-by-step guidance on establishing a disciple-making culture at your church.
- Review your budget, programming and competing priorities to make sure they are all pointing towards disciple-making



Administrative Competencies

THE APOSTLES AND THE ELDERS MET TOGETHER TO CONSIDER THIS MATTER.

-ACTS 15:6

You want your church to have the ability to maintain order in the midst of dynamic change, to have the ability to handle risks and to discern the Holy Spirit's promptings with clarity and courage. In unhealthy churches, administrative complexities and errors cause distractions and misunderstandings that hinder the collaboration necessary to work as a team. In a healthy church, communications flow well, telling a compelling narrative of God's work within the community. Everyone knows what they need to know and can connect with whomever they need to connect. The staff feels well supported, other leaders in the church are engaged, and necessary stakeholders are empowered to make the decisions that need to be made.

Some signs you are strong in this category

- People respond to email and other communications
- People show up prepared for leadership meetings
- Everyone knows their responsibilities, as well as the responsibilities of others on the team
- People don't fight over resources
- There are few log jams regarding processes, approval, and decision-making
- There are clear protocols for addressing issues that arise

Some things to consider if you are not strong in this category

- Establish a vision for internal and external communication
- Draw a map of your church administrative systems and how they are connected
- Rate your leadership on whether it is centralized or decentralized and make a goal of where you'd like it to be
- Strengthen the teamwork of staff, elders, committees and other groups and find out what they need to work well together
- Practice curiosity and dismantling of power struggles, silos, turf wars, and resistance to change
- Build unity by identifying any consistent source of resistance, disfunction, or unnecessary bureaucracy
- Reexamine your committee structure, committee leadership, polity, HR, and legal policies to make sure they are up to date and in line with your mission and vision



Joining the Mission of God

HE SAID TO THEM, 'THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL, BUT THE LABORERS ARE FEW; THEREFORE ASK THE LORD OF THE HARVEST TO SEND OUT LABORERS INTO HIS HARVEST.

-LUKE 10:2

Healthy churches follow the lead of the Holy Spirit that moves them outward. Moving from resistance to change, healthy congregations move from self-service to serving with their neighbors; authentically sharing Jesus in both word and action. Healthy churches believe that God is active already in their community and are called to join God's activity as witnesses of New Creation. They prioritize people over programs because they expect to encounter Christ with the least, the stranger, the hurting, the outcast, the vulnerable, and the marginalized.

Some signs you are strong in this category

- Your church is connected to several partner organizations in your vicinity
- Members of your church are telling stories and asking for support as they are discovering God with their neighbors
- People are willingly and joyfully serving in the community, and do not have to be prodded or rewarded
- Organized and organic missional events throughout the week experience higher participation and engagement
- Preachers are gathering and incorporating stories from congregation members about how they experienced God's mission throughout the week
- Your church, as an institution and as individual members, begins to question why they have so many latent resources and how to give them away in service of the church's mission

Some things to consider if you are not strong in this category

- Consider how you might listen to and learn from your non-Christian neighbors
- Describe what God's reign (kingdom) looks like in your region
- Look at your budget and star every line item that directly benefits those outside of your church (especially the surrounding neighborhood)
- Develop partnerships with community organizations
- Empower groups of disciples to discern their calling to mission, and rally the resources of the church to support them
- Practice what you preach and bring someone along to discover what God is doing with your immediate neighbors
- Pray specifically for people, issues, and events in your community that you believe God cares about
- Answer the question, If this church were to disband tomorrow, what difference would it make to our wider community? Who would notice if we closed our doors?
- Answer the question, What forces oppose God's reign in our community?



Leadership Development

IT WILL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU; BUT WHOEVER WISHES TO BE GREAT AMONG YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT.

-MATTHEW 20:26

Healthy churches equip and train leaders of all ages, genders, abilities, personalities, and backgrounds to accomplish the mission of God for the church. All the saints of the church are uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry and mission and all voices and gifts are to be welcomed, nurtured, and utilized.

Some signs you are strong in this category

- Existing church leaders are consistently apprenticing new church leaders
 - Leadership meetings feature input from everyone, and they frequently share conflicting ideas or questions that the group weighs without rupturing relationships
 - There is consistency of representation between the makeup of the leadership team, the rest of the church, and the wider community
 - Leadership transitions do not cause disruption of mission
 - Leaders try new things and fail; the failure is expected and is met with grace where learnings spark new experiments
 - Decisions are not made swiftly by one person, nor are they deliberated painstakingly by everyone; leaders waste no time expressing themselves, listening to each other, and trusting each other to move forward courageously
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Some things to consider if you are not strong in this category

- Pray for particular people that may be called to leadership in the church
- Create low-commitment spaces in which new leaders can explore their gifts and calling while building relationships with other leaders
- Allow leaders to try something new and fail, and create a plan for debriefing afterwards
- Compare the make-up of your leadership team and whether it resembles your church and the wider community; make a plan for better representation
- Have the leadership team take an assessment to determine gifting, and review the results together
- Create a process for facilitating group difference and conflict
- Sketch out a leadership development plan that starts with someone new in the community and ends with starting or leading their own ministry or church
- Practice giving ministry and leadership away by encouraging staff and key leaders to invite someone new to join them in their area

Contextual Worship



O LORD, YOU ARE MY GOD;
I WILL EXALT YOU, I WILL PRAISE YOUR NAME;
FOR YOU HAVE DONE WONDERFUL THINGS,
PLANS FORMED OF OLD, FAITHFUL AND SURE.

-ISAIAH 25:1

Healthy churches move beyond worship wars, understanding that good worship honors God, connects people in caring relationships, and prepares God's people for mission. The scattered life of the church should inform the way the Holy Spirit gathers us in worship. And the gathered aspects of our life together should prepare people for the scattered life of the church as the Holy Spirit sends us back into the neighborhood.

Some signs you are strong in this category

- Worship is contextual to the language, experiences, and abilities of everyone in the church
- Worship tells the story of God and invites people to play an active role in that story
- Worship is aligned with the mission of God in your context, incorporating prayers, songs, and stories that matter to what God is doing in the neighborhood
- Worship has been planned and designed by multiple leaders who diversify the preaching, singing, reading, prayers, sacraments, and other leadership elements
- Time and resources spent to plan worship gatherings are commensurate with the church's missional vision; the staff and budget are dedicated to worship planning and leadership in proportion, leaving plenty of resources for other initiatives throughout the week
- People, including leaders, enjoy participating in worship

Some things to consider if you are not strong in this category

- Form a diverse team to plan worship services
- Create a preaching team that reads and exegetes the text together
- Make worship a safe place for new leaders to practice leading without fear of failure
- Consider whether you need to adjust the sermon preparation process to create space for discipleship, mission, and other leadership
- Examine your liturgical resources to ensure the songs, prayers, and readings that you use are fitting for your context, accessible to all, and reflecting the voices of those who call your church home
- Utilize elements in your liturgy such as baptism, benediction, and prayers, to focus on mission in your community



Caring Mutual Relationships

BY THIS EVERYONE WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

-JOHN 13:35

Healthy churches are thriving, multi-tiered ecosystems of relationship. People connect with and care for their closest couple of friends, their small group of companions, their midsized communities of care, their wider church family, and the world around them. They resist the forces of dualism, individualism, consumerism, and materialism that break down relationships, and they embrace diversity. They do this by practicing hospitality and generosity in all levels of the community.

Some signs you are strong in this category

- People organically spend time with each other outside of organized gatherings
- Gatherings feel warm; people chat with each other across boundaries and linger afterwards
- People invite others into their home and express intimate signs of care such as bringing over meals during times of crisis
- People share their resources with each other, with the wider church, and with the larger community
- People show up for one another's important life events

Some things to consider if you are not strong in this category

- Begin inviting members of your church into your home, extending hospitality and generosity towards them in friendship
- Create times of play and care for your leadership team, and invite them to create similar times with other members of the church
- Improve communication and remove silos that separate people or keep people in the dark
- Repeat your outward-focused vision and mission often, finding spaces for people to create collaborative relationships
- Create shared experiences for the whole church to create new memories such as an outreach event, a picnic, or a trip
- Identify the most vulnerable members of your church and create a plan to provide consistent care and prayer for them
- Review your plan to disciple kids and teens, and make sure each of them is connected to adults who spend time with them and pray for them
- Review your pastoral care plan and make sure that care is available for the congregation



Ecclesial Health and Sustainability

FOR I WILL RESTORE HEALTH TO YOU,
AND YOUR WOUNDS I WILL HEAL...

-JEREMIAH 30:17

Healthy churches understand that they exist primarily for those who are not yet there. Mission, vision, and values drive sustainable budgets of generosity that promote the shalom of the neighborhood. Unhealthy churches continue to hoard and maintain homeostasis to hedge against an uncertain future. But healthy churches grow towards brief moments of homeostasis during which God invites them to multiply what little they have for kingdom priorities.

Some signs you are strong in this category

- Attendance is stable and does not experience wild fluctuations
- Giving is stable and does not experience wild fluctuations
- Debt does not influence decisions around mission and vision
- Assets such as property and finances are being used well in support of the church's mission
- The church demographics match the demographics of the neighborhood around it
- There is an even spread of ages
- Leadership is refreshed and is able to conceptualize a hopeful vision of the church in five to ten years

Some things to consider if you are not strong in this category

- Review the previous six health markers to explore why you might have fluctuations in attendance and giving
- Appoint a professional and team to assess your current debt and assets as well as what they indicate about your future
- Consider pathways out of decline such as closing, partnerships/mergers, restarts, and deep revitalization work



Using This Guide To Transform Your Church

You've taken the quiz and you understand your results. Now what?

We suggest a step-by-step process to put these into action:

1. Make sure your whole leadership team takes the assessment. Compile all of your results and analyze them.
2. Identify 3 health markers that are worth discussing with your leadership team. Pay attention to the areas everyone scored low, the areas everyone scored high, and the areas where there was significant difference in assessment scores.
3. Plan a series of meetings to review your health assessment results. We recommend starting with an immersive experience in scripture, displaying the results, and asking specific questions about your 3 chosen areas to gain clarity as a team around your priorities. By the end of the last meeting, you should have the beginnings of a plan to move forward together from decline to greater health and vitality.

If we can be helpful to you, please don't hesitate to reach out at www.cyclicalfullcircle.com or by emailing rob@cyclicalfullcircle.com. We work with church leaders just like you all the time, joining them in charting a path away from decline and towards God's mission. We can help facilitate this kind of journey by gathering your assessment results for your church, leading meetings with your leadership team, and joining you to walk the road towards transformation and innovation as a trusted guide.