

Seventh Mark: Does a few things and does them well
Focused rather than frenetic

- **Does the basics well: public worship, pastoral care, stewardship and administration**
- **Occasional offices: make sense of life and communicate faith**
- **Being good news as a church in its attitudes and ways of working**
- **Enjoys what it does and is relaxed about what is not being done.**

There is an unconscious assumption that growing churches are running faster than others, being more energetic and active. This assumption has been challenged. Health and growth tends to occur where people feel relaxed and comfortable with what they are doing; they are focused rather than frenetic and able to leave some things undone, able to enjoy life and to reflect on the value of what they are doing.

- **Does the basics well: public worship, pastoral care, stewardship and administration**

These churches are not primarily distinguished by doing extraordinary things or a vast number of different things, but by doing a quality job with the basic things. Church buildings are tidy and uncluttered (and fit for purpose), meetings are effective, thought goes into the leading of worship and to care of individuals. The administration of these churches does not draw attention to itself but the job, whether the PCC minutes, the notices sheet, or the handling of the finances and proper attention to tax rebates on covenanted giving, are all likely to be done well. 'Quietly efficient' seems to be their style.

- **Occasional Offices: make sense of life and communicate faith**

Baptisms, weddings, funerals, and the preparation for them, are done well. They are unhurried, with thought, care and attention to detail and done in a loving and prayerful way that establishes good relationships with those involved. The goal is to do a quality job.

- **Being good news as a church in its attitudes and ways of working**

Healthy churches recognise that they are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ by how they are church, usually long before they have any opportunity to speak about faith to people personally.

The dynamic we (*the authors of the Healthy Church Handbook*) observed was that, in these churches, because people were not frantically trying to do too much, they did a few things well, which gave them satisfaction. As a result, much of what they do tends to have a positive effect.

In contrast, in other churches, too much is taken on, done in a rushed way (because it does not have a proper priority or is not really believed in), so what is done does not really work or is less effective than it could be. The reaction to this situation is often 'if only we did x and x' it would improve. In other words, take on more tasks to improve the task there is little time for, priority accorded to, or belief in. In truth, the answer is to do less and do it better.

Healthy churches do find that 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light'. This is because they take time to *seek what God wants* and it often bears fruit. A quiet sense of vocation pervades the whole church.

It takes time for churches to develop a quiet sense of vocation. It takes time to develop the faith and confidence to believe in what is being done and why. Encouraging people to take on one task in the church and do it well, can help. Sometimes this process means letting go of perceived 'essential services'.

- **Enjoys what it does and is relaxed about what is not being done.**

There is a significantly higher sense of enjoying church in healthy churches. Christian Schwarz in *Natural Church Development* notes that laughter is one of the marks of a healthy church. One could add 'and tears', for healthy churches have an attractive and real humanity

and are not trying to impress or achieve. They are what they preach. It is that simple – and that costly.

*A flourishing rural church was eager to communicate its faith but wanted to do it in a way that connected with the surrounding community and that did not leave themselves with an overloaded programme or unachievable goals. They decided to hold four **Food for Thought** evenings each year in the village hall. A very good meal was laid on and tables were beautifully laid and decorated. Each evening they had someone with an interesting job who came to speak about their work and their faith. The vicar reported that his primary job after the first couple of years was persuading church members not to attend so that those who did not go to church could have a place, since seats were sold out several weeks in advance. It was clearly done very well, with a great sense of occasion. They were very enjoyable evenings and a means of provoking a steady stream of people wanting to explore the faith further. At Christmas over one-third of the total population of the three villages attended church on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.*

This exploration of the Seven Marks brings us back to where we began. **Healthy churches live out a faith that is real to them and shapes what they do and how they do it.**

Study passages

Mark 1: 14-15 and 21-39

- What did Jesus see as his task and vocation?
- Why is Jesus so clear about the job to be done?
- How can our lives, and our churches, follow that pattern?
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Matthew: 11:25-30: So why are we so busy?

Meditation

The church is called upon to embody the life of Jesus Christ of whom it was said:

He has done everything well. (Mark 7: 37)