

Fifth Mark: Operates as a community, makes room for all rather than functioning as a club or religious organisation

- **relationships: are nurtured, often in small groups, so that people feel accepted and are helped to grow in faith and service.**
- **leadership: lay and ordained work as a team to develop locally appropriate expressions of all seven marks of a healthy church.**
- **lay ministry: the different gifts, experiences and faith journeys of all are valued and given expression in the life of the church.**

Community is Trinitarian

Because God is Trinitarian - Three-Persons-in-One – God's life will find fullest expression in and through relationships, hence the importance of Church operating as community – within the community. However, it is quite often the case that congregations are gatherings of individuals rather than a 'Christian community'.

The Church, as a community of faith, is meant to be a 'pilot project' of the Kingdom of God.

Communities act out their focus on valuing people for their own sake. They value good personal relationships. Clubs and organisations tend to focus on communicating behavioural norms that make someone acceptable (or not) and on the contribution members might make to getting a task done.

This is a very generalised way of looking at structures. Communities also have 'jobs to be done' and good organisations do care about the quality of relationships within their structure. Nevertheless, there is a difference. Churches should and often do have the capacity to include people who may not be able to complete tasks and who come with needs to be taken care of.

In contemporary culture people value relationships and want to belong, typically in small, informal and fluid networks. They are resistant to joining organisations that have a more impersonal, fixed and controlling feel to them.

This means that a church that functions as a community is more likely to engage with people today than a church that operates in a solely organisational mode.

There is evidence to suggest that small churches are doing better than large ones, because small churches naturally operate as communities (though can sometimes feel like 'closed communities').

Likewise, it is not surprising that flourishing larger churches make considerable use of small groups. They have found ways of building the value of the small into the structure of the large, thus enabling them to operate as community.

This shows itself in three particular ways:

- **relationships: are nurtured, often in small groups, so that people feel accepted and are helped to grow in faith and service.**

Healthy churches are aware of and take care about relationships. Not only one-to-one, but also in building a sense of belonging. This often shows in their capacity to celebrate and party as well as in the way the notices are delivered on Sunday. It usually results in a wide number of people being involved in different ways in the life of the church. That involvement will be related to their particular gifts and personality, for communities recognise and release gifts rather than squeeze people into roles they do not fit. (A warning here about adopting projects before assessing the skills and abilities of who might want to be involved).

It is not a matter of **a few people doing everything** but of a church that is discovering how to welcome the contribution of a diverse group of people.

But, not everything in a church that operates as a 'community' is always perfect. One of the ways in which the strength of a community can be measured is by how it handles conflict:

Roberta Bondi writes:

One form of love-destroying dishonesty characteristic of our life together in our marriages and churches is our niceness. In our niceness we believe that being supportive means never speaking our real thoughts and feelings in areas of disagreement. Where we disagree, we need to push against each other in direct ways rather than in underhanded ways that usually result in mutual bitterness.

- **leadership: lay and ordained work as a team to develop locally appropriate expressions of all seven marks of a healthy church.**

A necessary quality of leadership in a healthy church is 'enabling'; leaders who affirm the gifts and contribution of all. This is a necessary quality for any leader - worship leader, Junior Church leader, Churchwarden, priest, etc. Healthy ministries are rarely one-man or one-woman bands. Moreover, healthy leaders enable the ministry of the whole church. Here is a shift from a traditional priestly role (in the sense of being *the* person who ministers to the congregation) – to an episcopal role (overseeing the ministry of *all*).

There is also a shift in the leadership role of clergy from being providers of answers to the church to formulators of questions that the church needs to address.

- **lay ministry: the different gifts, experiences and faith journeys of all are valued and given expression in and beyond the life of the church.**

Healthy churches are highly participative. Those whose faith is real want to do something about it and with it. Healthy churches make this possible.

Evangelism is a case in point.

Evangelism has been seen as something that specialists did. Now, the Church increasingly sees evangelism as 'helping people on the journey to faith.' Typically this is often done through running some 'process evangelism' course like Alpha. Evangelism is much wider than that definition. Evangelism is what we do, together.

Evangelism happens when a group gets together to run a bible study or another course; some people have skills in leading, some in facilitating discussion and conversation; others in making refreshments available; some in the confidence to invite others to join them, some in praying for people, some in organisation, etc. The church has become the evangelist and strengthened its sense of community in the process. The church is in it together.

Lay ministry is not about 'what I do in church'. Healthy churches affirm people beyond the church in their daily living.

[A] church focused its energies on developing listening skills in its life. This is not only helping to build the church as a community in which people do listen to one another, but it has a wider goal too. It is equipping people in their marriages and in their leisure and work situations, as well as in community politics, to make a 'listening contribution' to all they do. They are also finding that evangelism is taking place because people making some tentative contact with the church are finding that [they]... [are] being listened to ... before any attempt is made to explain the Christian faith to them.

Study passages

Ephesians 4: 1-16; 4: 25-5:2

- For St. Paul, what makes a healthy church?
- Why is it good that we are not all the same?
- What is our part in contributing to a healthy church?

Mark 10: 35-45: What can we do to build a healthy community?

Meditation

The Church is called upon to embody the life of Jesus Christ who, having loved his own, loved them to the end and told us that:

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13: 35)