

*Say A-h-h-h*

## How to assess your church's well-being

By Micah Fries

*The road to church health may be a matter of asking the right questions.*

**S**cared to death. That's how I felt sitting in a small office in Burkina Faso, West Africa, where my wife and I were serving as new missionaries.

I hadn't felt well for a few weeks, but had put off going to the doctor. We lived out in the bush—so a simple checkup meant a five-hour drive to the nearest doctor.

Finally, during a trip to the capital city, I stopped by a doctor's office. I ran through my symptoms—a slight fever each day for the last three weeks; zero energy; and I was sleeping a lot. He ran some blood tests.

The diagnosis: Malaria. And not just any Malaria, but the most dangerous strain.

The doctor told me I was fortunate to be alive. The only remedy was to treat my condition immediately and aggressively.

If it weren't for that doctor's visit and diagnosis, who knows what would have happened to me.

Unfortunately, many churches in the United States are facing the same predicament I faced in that doctor's office. They've been sick for a while, but have put off doing anything to address their illness.

But what seemed like nominal pain and marginal problems are in

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fact, signs of a life-threatening condition. Churches often face problems that are much deeper and much more systemic than they realize or want to admit.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSMENT

Like the doctor and medical exam that pointed me to the right diagnosis and treatment, the church today needs an evaluation and an appropriate plan of action.

Church leaders are masters of measurements—attendance, baptisms, finances, and more. But sick churches can occasionally score well on these assessments. What’s more, none of these assessments do anything to help assess the one thing Jesus commanded us to do—make disciples. Church leaders need a different scorecard for that.

The Transformational Church Assessment Tool (TCAT) takes a comprehensive look at a church’s structures and systems, identifying not only weaknesses, but also clarifying strengths.

### ESSENTIALS FOR TRUE CHURCH HEALTH

While this new scorecard measures the tangible—leadership training, worship attendance, and group Bible study attendance—it also measures some of the intangible elements of church life.

The TCAT helps churches honestly evaluate how their members perceive they are doing in relation to spiritual transformation. The results provide them with a snapshot of perceived strengths and perceived challenges based on the seven elements of a healthy, transformational church:

**Missionary mentality.** Transformational churches understand the cultural context surrounding the

church. And they strive for everything they do to be in the language and culture of the people they are trying to reach. Transformational churches know, understand, and are deeply engaged with their cities, communities, and people. Are your church members passionate about the people and community where God has placed them?

**Vibrant leadership.** Transformational leaders are focused on the mission of God for their church, are tenacious about the vision, and are people focused. Vibrant leaders lead their people to worship, live in community, and live on mission. They promote a culture of we instead of me. They expect, encourage, equip, and empower members to serve.

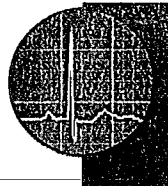
**Relational intentionality.** People find and follow Jesus through relationships. Transformational churches use systems and processes designed to provide and promote relationship development—for first time guests, new members, and long-term members.

**Prayerful dependence.** In transformational churches, spontaneous prayer is normal in the life of the church. Prayer is not a program, yet it undergirds everything the church does. Prayer has always held a significant role in the church, and this is especially true in times of revitalization. Is it normal to see people praying together at your church?

**Worship.** Transformational churches place worship at the center of their efforts. They know worship is a way of living, not an aspect of church programming. They expect God’s presence to be real and transformative in their worship experience. Do your worship leaders value participation over performance?

**Community.** Transformational churches place a premium on involving





people in small group communities within the congregation. They place heavy emphasis on getting new members immediately involved in Sunday School classes, small groups, or discipleship classes. Does your church have groups where nonbelievers feel comfortable asking hard questions and where believers can find encouragement?

**Mission.** Transformational churches have consciously decided that their existence is directly related to the mission of seeing people reconciled to God through Christ. Evangelism is a natural part of life for their members. Does your church challenge members to build significant relationships with people who are non-Christian? Does your church provide service opportunities for your people to be engaged with the unchurched in your local city or community?

#### CELEBRATE AND CALIBRATE

Not only do churches struggle with appropriate assessments, they're often weak at celebrating what God is doing in their midst.

I recently consulted with a church that took the TCAT. I helped the leaders see how they could take their top two scores and celebrate what God is doing. This encourages the church and strengthens belief in the direction of the leaders, as well as recognizes God's work among them.

I then showed them how they could turn their bottom two areas into strategic goals for the coming year. After a year of focusing on those areas of weakness, they'll find they've made progress making disciples, in substantive and measurable ways.

A church that takes seriously Christ's command to be and make disciples, and that invests in the necessary tools to evaluate its effectiveness, is far more likely to be a church where people are experiencing the gospel and where

lives are being changed. Churches that don't take this seriously are more likely to find themselves lying on the proverbial hospital bed, struggling to survive, and wondering if the doctor's diagnosis has come too late.

Don't let that happen to your church. Take seriously the call to assess your church's health and effectiveness as you make disciples, and watch God help your church thrive. ■

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## 5 questions to assess your church's health

- 1. Is the ratio of worship attenders to conversions/baptisms growing or declining?** If the ratio of worship attenders to conversions/baptisms is growing higher, your church may be unhealthy.
- 2. Is the percentage of worship attenders who also attend Sunday School/Small Groups growing or declining?** In a healthy church, an increasingly higher percentage of worship attenders will be seeking community through your Sunday School/Small Group ministry.
- 3. Do you have a clearly defined disciple-making strategy? And is the average worship attender familiar enough with the strategy to repeat it, if asked?** Unhealthy churches lack clarity about their discipleship pathway, and the attenders in their church will struggle to identify it.
- 4. Are you multiplying leadership?** Unhealthy churches rest on the backs of one leader or a small group of leaders. Healthy churches multiply leaders and hand off leadership.
- 5. Have you become an internally focused church?** People are like cars out of alignment. Left to ourselves, we turn inward. Healthy churches intentionally point their people outside the church, to the lost.