

## 2015 AGM Celebration

Discussion – what are the characteristics of a healthy church – Have piece of paper for people write down ideas

### **Welcome.**

Today's service is going to be a bit different. Believe it or not, this is our churches Annual General meeting. I hope for a large part of it you won't recognise it as that...The theme is "Becoming a healthy church" and we are going to hear from some of our ministry leaders about our church and the health, or otherwise, of it.

So often people only think of church as Sunday morning, but church is so much more than that, sure Sunday morning might be our largest gathering point, but Sunday is not the limit of our church!

Play video – What is the church really about?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kNESgIYPh8>

### **Intro to the 8 characteristics**

Becoming a healthy church – it's always a journey and frustratingly, due the Human component of the church, one that I am sure we will ever be able to claim to have attained.

However over the years people have come up with some characteristics of a healthy church and we want to use that as a structure for us to look at ourselves and our church.

The first Characteristic is **Empowering Leadership** – Brian

Christian leadership begins with an intimate relationship with God. However, in addition to this, leaders of healthy churches concentrate on empowering others for ministry. It is not powerful leadership but empowering leadership. Effective leaders multiply, guide, empower and equip disciples to realize their full potential in Christ and work together to accomplish God's vision.

*Tell my leadership story.*

- *Boy brigade leadership course*
- *Youth Pastor*
- *Senior Pastor*

Key ministry leaders are there to equip, support, motivate and mentor individuals, enabling them to become all that God wants them to be. They invest the majority of their time in discipleship, delegation and multiplication rather than fulfilling church responsibilities on their own.

Empowering Leadership is a key characteristic of a healthy church and One person who I see does this really well is Jan in the children's ministry.

### **Gift-oriented ministry – Jan**

The Holy Spirit gives every Christian spiritual gifts for the building of God's kingdom.

As church leaders we want to help people discover those gifts and have an opportunity to use and develop them.

When people serve using their God given gifts, they find serving rewarding and they are blessed while they bless others.

The relational model of Children's ministry that we use here at OBC needs lots of leaders and volunteers... and in an ideal world we would only have volunteers who are gifted relationally, to disciple young people. I realise we do have some serving in CM who are having their turn or serving out of obligation and I am grateful to those people, – but when I am looking for people to be involved I am considering who is the right fit rather than who can be a warm body in the room to fill a hole in the roster. As a leader I have to be willing for people to have a go and then decide this ministry is not for them – sometimes we don't know until we give something a try - and I have to let them go with my blessing and thanks for giving it a try.

It also means I can't be too controlling... yes, we have core aims and vision... but the actual content of what we do needs to be flexible. We have this line in our CM's handbook: Feel free to change the lesson to suit the children's needs and your giftings.

Flexibility is important so Leaders have some freedom to put their stamp on what they are doing. On any given week in Jigsaw, each of our small groups can be doing something completely different as leaders adapt the same material to suit themselves and the children.

The rewards of this are huge – a relatively stable team of volunteers who are able to be committed long term because they are serving in their sweet spot...

a team of volunteers who want the ministry to grow, who get the vision and add their good ideas... and the ministry is stronger because it's our ministry.

### **Passionate spirituality – Matt –**

Effective ministry flows out of a passionate spirituality. Are we as Christians on fire for God? Do our hearts burn within us for God, as it did for the two disciples who walked on the road to Emmaus with the risen Jesus? Do we live committed lives, and practice our faith with joy and enthusiasm? Are we putting God first in our lives and living with a massive passion for Him?

It's easy to fall into being a lukewarm Christian. Our lives are busy enough that the temptation becomes to put God to the side and we say to ourselves, "We'll spend more time with God soon." But being a people of God who display passionate spirituality is an important characteristic of being a healthy church.

Working in the youth ministry here at OBC I have seen passionate spirituality in the lives of our young people. Whether it is on a Friday night having quiet reflective time in the chapel, or at Easter camp with the massive group gatherings and people pouring their hearts out to God, I've seen passion for God. And let me tell you, it is infectious.

May we be a church that is on fire for God. A church that is spiritually intimate. Spiritual intimacy leads to a strong conviction that God will act in powerful ways. This characteristic is evident in our lives by examining things like our prayer life, personal use of the bible, and how much God comes up in our normal everyday conversation.

One thing we need to be careful of is not to define spirituality too narrowly. Passionate spirituality is neither dependant on being charismatic or noncharismatic. It's not about putting your hands up when singing worship songs. It's about the heart. And we need to develop the spiritual disciplines in the lives of our people in such a way that it is more than just "performing ones duty" but rather, it is **an inspiring experience**. Pure doctrine alone does not bring growth; people need to learn to live their faith with contagious enthusiasm, and with a desire to share it with others. To live in community with passionately committed Christians.

### **Inspiring worship – Declan –**

Inspiring worship is both a personal and corporate encounter with the living God. The criterion for a growing church is not worship style, but is it an inspiring experience for those who attend? Both personal and corporate worship must be infused with the presence of God resulting in times of

excitement and times of quiet reverence. Inspiring worship is not driven by a particular style but rather the shared experience of God's awesome presence. It is (and for some this is a heresy) “fun”.

We want to develop a worship service that people want to go to, rather than fulfil their Christian duty. We want an inspirational (not just entertaining) service that draws people all by itself and that people leave feeling that they have encountered God.

Goals:

- A tasteful place of worship
- A well organised welcome and integration team
- Competent worship leaders or MC
- Meaningful and varied worship
- Using a wide variety of people
- What does worship look like on Mondays?

### **Holistic small groups – Matt –**

*Holistic Small Groups are vital in any church. They are kind of like a blood pressure test to measure the heartbeat of a church. Here at OBC, unfortunately this area of church is still not as strong as we would like.*

*The whole area of small groups was brought up at last Sunday's Family forum meeting, which is good that people are noticing this hole at OBC and want to do something about it. So we are aware of it.*

*We do have some great groups that are generally going really well and we are hearing some good stories about what the groups are doing and how they are connecting with each other and the community, but at the end of the day not enough people in the church are involved in groups. Ideally we would love around 80% of people or more in the church to be involved in active holistic small groups.*

*Church is about community; people entering into relationships with each other, not entering a building. If you are not regularly rubbing shoulders with other Christians in some relational way which involves Worship, (not singing) community, discipleship and Mission, then the bottom line is that you are not attending church. And therefore you might not be growing very fast as a Christian.*

Holistic small groups are disciple-making communities where people can find intimate community, practical help and sensitive spiritual interaction. These groups must go beyond simply discussing bible passages, to applying the spiritual message into their daily lives.

Groups will endeavour to meet individual needs, develop each person according to their God-given gifts, raise leaders to sustain the growth of the church and reach the unchurched. Like healthy body cells, holistic small groups are designed to grow and multiply.

Community is a vital part of being a Christian and growing – therefore small groups need to be a priority. They are not merely a supplement to a healthy church, but rather much of the essence of true church life is worked out in small groups. The larger our church grows the greater the need for an effective small group ministry.

We are always looking for people wanting to join or host a small group. I say host, rather than lead, because it's not that difficult or time consuming to host one. There are many DVD resources that you can plug and play, then discuss the material as a group, and start to build deeper relationships with each other. So if you are keen to host or join a small group then please come and have a chat to myself or one of the pastoral team.

The bottom line here is that this is an area we need to grow in to become a healthier church. And to help us all and others to become lifelong committed disciples of Christ.

### **Functional structures – Brian**

The Church is described as the living Body of Christ. Like all healthy organisms, it requires numerous systems that work together to fulfil its intended purpose. Structures do not cause growth, but they can allow it or prevent it.

As a leadership, as the church grows and develops, as the culture changes, we must evaluate our systems regularly to determine if it is still structured the best way to accomplish the intended purpose.

Personally I think we do pretty well in this area. We regularly evaluate to what extent the established church structures improve the self-organisation of the church. Elements not meeting this standard (ie discouraging leadership structures, burdensome procedures, demotivating financial concepts etc) will be changed or eliminated.

One of the structural areas we have had to adapt to is the busyness of people, the preciousness of Saturdays, the Health and safety rules and that effects what we can get done around the church by volunteers and working bees.

### **Loving relationships – Matt –**

Loving relationships are at the heart of our faith and of a healthy, growing church. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second greatest is to love your neighbour as yourself. A loving relationship with God and loving relationships with people needs to be our focus. Everything we do and everything we are here at OBC needs to flow out of these two commands.

In John's gospel Jesus also said "If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples." We recently looked at the Ten Pillars of faith and we saw that 'Building lifelong committed disciples of Jesus' was at the heart of these pillars. Loving relationships is an integral part of the discipleship process. And this is about living in community with each other. Small groups play a huge part here too.

Practical demonstrations of love build authentic Christian community and they help to bring others into God's kingdom. This can be measured by a few things, such as how much time do we spend with each other outside of official church events. How generous is the church in paying compliments? When's the last time you complimented someone here in the church? How much laughter is there? Are we having fun as a church, as OBC? Is there an awareness of personal needs within our community? Having the email prayer chain is a great way of supporting one another through prayer and being there for each other.

When it comes down to it, there is a significant relationship between the ability of a church to demonstrate love and its growth potential. Genuine, practical love has a divinely generated magnetic power far more effective than most evangelistic programmes.

People don't want to hear us talk about love, they want to experience it. People don't care how much we know; until they know how much we care.

So what are our goals here?

- That the social, prayer and caring aspect of small groups should be higher than the bible study aspect.

- As a church that we should have regular events that get people interacting, having fun, and serving together. And if this is an area you are passionate about and want to develop within the life of OBC then please talk to one of the pastoral staff team.
- That we need effective methods for integrating new people into loving relationships in the church – we have a newcomers lunch set for the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, which is a great way for people new to the church to get to know us a bit and meet each other too.
- That we have a mission/service core team helping others get involved. Go be part of a BMF lunch, see what's happening.
- And Have someone over for lunch month – I know that life gets busy, but we need to make space to develop relationships with each other in the church. We don't want to be so caught up in our own lives that we miss out on the blessing that comes from growing loving relationships in our church community.

### **Need-oriented evangelism Brian**

We as your pastoral staff agonise over developing a healthy church? We agonise over getting the balance right, making sure we are addressing these 7/8 characteristics. Some things we are doing pretty well and other things less so. The area that I think we struggle the most in is the last area. Over the last 8 years that I have been here, we have worked hard at keeping mission before us, to be missional, to be incarnational, to be out there making a difference. Not through a whole lot of church programmes but just in our day to day life and working with organisations that already exist. I think the direction we are going is good/right/biblical even. But at this stage we are not seeing the fruit I would like, or at least as much fruit as I would like. It's not about getting bigger but it is about seeing people come into a relationship with Jesus or at least taking another step closer to Jesus. Maybe I am just not hearing the stories, but I want to!

If you read the bible it is clear that the task of each Christian to use his or her gifts to serve the non-Christians with whom they have a personal relationship and to see to it that they hear the gospel and come into contact with local church.

It's not about preaching at them, it's not about dragging them along to church. Need-oriented evangelism intentionally cultivates relationships with pre-Christians focusing on their questions and needs. Not on what we want them to do, or how they can fit into our church.

Using appropriate ministries and authentic relationships, believers can love and care others into the family of God.

Mainly Music is a need oriented evangelistic event – but only if we use it as such and the church gets behind it. Esol is too, ICONZ is, Youth is, Children's ministry is, Food rescue is, the Ukulele group is, of course Alpha is. These are the programmed ministries we are involved in but then there are individuals out there in the community.

We need to give priority to reaching those outside the church. Every Christian is not an evangelist, but we all had a responsibility to use the way God has created us to help fulfil the great commission.

Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mjcZtwMZsY>

Finish with imagine

**Imagine** a community of people whose desire is heaven on earth, a community of grace where everyone is accepted and respected and their journey valued, regardless of ethnicity, of their background, beliefs or place in society, a community where everyone looks out for the concerns of others and no one walks alone, a community that simply believes in a better way.

**Imagine** a community of people who are devoted to following Jesus together, learning to live like him and love like him, helping one another understand our faith and grow in our love for God and love for neighbour, where we are gradually being transformed into better people ... better friends, better family members, better workers, better students ... becoming people who enjoy life to the full and who can deal with adversity well.

**Imagine** a community of peace and refreshment where it's possible to find shelter from the frenzied pace of life, to slow down and explore the mystery and meaning of our own existence, where we can take time to address the roots of our anxieties, a place of hope where we can find help and healing and the power to change.

**Imagine** a community like that living and working throughout Tauranga as agents of Jesus, agents of love and hope wherever they are, serving neighbours, caring for the poor, helping the oppressed, conveying the good news of Jesus through word and deed.

**Imagine** a community of people who live simply and ethically so that they can generously share their resources with others, a community that values and

cares for the environment and reaches out beyond social, cultural, and political barriers to offer help and hope to all.

**Imagine** a community of people who make the world a better place. That's the church Jesus died for. That's the dream of God. That's what Otumoetai Baptist Church aspires to be.