

Pensacola Bay Baptist Association | 12 Characteristics of a Healthy Church*

1. Biblical Evangelism:



The word “church” comes from a Greek word that means “an assembly of called-out ones.” It denotes that before a church can ever actually gather, the people must first hear the call to do so. As Paul questioned in Romans 10:14–15, “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” Churches are built through the fervent, faithful proclamation of Christ and Him crucified. Therefore, it’s the responsibility of the local church to be a mouthpiece of Christ, calling all who would come to repentance and new life. But the new believer’s walk doesn’t end when they answer the call. Indeed, it has only just begun.

Recommended Metric: 10:1 Gospel Conversations – 10 gospel conversations per year for every weekly attender. (ex. 1000 gospel conversations in a calendar year for a church with average weekly attendance of 100).

2. Biblical Discipleship:



According to Matthew 28:16–20, the command to “make disciples of all nations” is qualified by two activities: “baptizing them” and “teaching them to obey.” Once a believer has declared allegiance to Christ through baptism, it’s the responsibility of the local church to be the place where they can learn obedience to Christ’s commands. A healthy church is a group of people intentionally living out the timeless, universal truths of the gospel within the context of a finite, local community.

Recommended Metric: 60% connection - a minimum of 60% of church attenders are involved in a discipleship context (e.g. one-on-one, small group)

3. Biblical Membership:



Almost every time the word “ecclesia” (church as defined above) appears in the New Testament, it refers to a particular gathering of Christians in a particular place. It’s used to describe people who know one another and share their very lives. They realize and celebrate that they are a part of something larger: the universal church that is united across all space and time. But membership in that body is undergirded by an identifiable, local membership, with clear qualifications and expectations for how they should love and serve one another and engage in God’s mission together. Each member is both called and equipped to serve the others (1 Cor. 12), with a diverse array of gifts and abilities coming together to form a cooperative whole.

Recommended Metric: Active Church Membership Process - Each church has a process that ensures regenerate church membership, and a separate process that ensures members are meeting expectations outlined for all members.

4. Biblical Leadership:



One of the many gifts of the Holy Spirit is that of leadership. No church can experience health without the leadership of the pastors that Paul described in passages like 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Such leaders are never meant to be tyrants but rather shepherds, laboring “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). Church members who are gifted and called to serve as leaders have the responsibility of equipping their fellow members with what they need in order to be who Christ called them to be. The calling of a pastor or elder is a challenging one, but that doesn’t mean the list of competencies is unattainable. Faithful, biblical teaching is the means by which Jesus leads his church.

Recommended Metric: Pastor Accountability and Coaching – each church pastor is in an accountability relationship for personal protection and spiritual growth (battle buddy); each pastor has a ministry coach to help them lead well their congregation.

5. Biblical Preaching & Teaching:



Faithful, biblical teaching is the means by which Jesus leads His church. Individual Bible study is essential, but it isn't sufficient. Healthy churches regularly set aside time to listen to their pastors and teachers carefully interpret and apply the Word of God to every area of life. Sound, biblical interpretation requires much time, effort, study, and training, so church leaders need to be equipped accordingly. When healthy churches gather together, they come expecting to hear God speak in both the sermon and the service.

Recommended Metric: Weekly Bible Teaching – Pastors will ensure that the Bible is soundly read and taught in every, all 52 weeks, worship gatherings of the church.

6. Biblical ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper:



Healthy churches regularly observe believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper as a part of their worship services. Both are designed to declare and affirm our commitment to Christ and his body. Some churches share the Lord's Supper each week, and others share it each month. Some churches have baptistries, others have bathtubs. There is freedom of expression as long as they are practiced in accordance with Scripture and within the context of biblical worship.

Recommended Metric: Invitation and Enforcement – church will regularly invite new believers to profess their faith in Jesus through believer's baptism and for all repentant Christians to participate in regular Lord's Supper opportunities. Church will enforce sanctity of ordinances by not conducting baptisms casually and not extending Lord's Supper to unrepentant.

7. Biblical Worship:



The local churches come together to exalt God, sing, share testimonies of God's grace, spur one another on toward Christ and his Word, and send one another out into service. As long as its members are following the Bible's instructions for worship (1 Cor. 11, 1 Cor. 14, etc.), a healthy church is free to enjoy a wide range of variety, diversity, and creativity in their worship together.

Recommended Metric: Biblical Worship Surety – church ensures that all of the songs it sings in corporate worship are rooted in sound biblical theology

8. Biblical Fellowship:



Fellowship described in the Bible encapsulates all its "one anothers:" love, serve, care, teach, serve, admonish, exalt, build up, and bear with one another. Biblical fellowship is about sharing our lives with fellow church members, allowing the simplest and the deepest aspects of our days to become entwined. No one is intended to live the Christian life in isolation, and the lone Christian is just as likely to wither in loneliness as they are to stumble into disobedience.

Recommended Metric: Fellowship Focus – Church has ongoing team(s) or individual(s) tasked with increasing biblical fellowship among congregants.

9. Biblical Prayer:



Every major advance of the gospel in the book of Acts comes about as a response to the people of God praying together. If we desire the same, then like the early church, we must devote ourselves to prayer (Acts 2:42), regularly joining with one another with both dedication to and desperation for communion with God. And just like Bible study, private prayer is essential but insufficient. A healthy church not only prays but prays with one another.

Recommended Metric: Prayerful process and practice - Church establishes and follows a process to collect prayer requests and celebrate answered prayers, engages corporately in prayer, and equips individuals to pray personally.

10. Biblical Accountability and Discipline:



Just as we need fellowship to spur us on to obedience, we need accountability to call us back from sin. Healthy churches must be places where the young in faith can be lovingly enlightened and where the disobedient can be gently rebuked in a manner consistent with the attitude and the process described by Christ in Matthew 18:15–20.

Recommended Metric: Accountability and Discipline -Church fosters relationships where individuals hold one another accountable for personal and spiritual growth; Church adopts, and practices, an agreed upon process for biblically calling people back from their sin.

11. Biblical Giving:



Healthy churches are financially self-sustaining or at least moving in that direction. More importantly, though, healthy churches make generous giving to the cause of the gospel a regular corporate practice, as described in 1 Corinthians 16:1–4. And that generosity shouldn't be confined to our finances. The desire to see the gospel change others' lives should characterize every facet of our own.

Recommended Metric: \$40:1 ration – giving to attendance ratio of a minimum of \$40 for every individual attending who is above the age of 18 years of age. (ex. 100 adults/week = \$4,000 minimum). Further, a process that equips congregants in biblical stewardship and provides multiple formats for participation.

12. Biblical Mission:



Congregations must be actively engaged in making disciples locally and globally. Every member is a disciple maker in the world, and healthy churches are both organized and administered in such a way that members are motivated, trained, and equipped to make disciples in whatever context God places them. A healthy church, by its very definition, will create other healthy churches.

Recommended Metric: Missional Ready – church has a plan to conduct itself for the mission of God as a witness and ambassador of reconciliation between God and man to the surrounding and global community.