

## **What Does a Healthy Church Look Like?**

**By Bob Young**

Many people think that the health of a church can be determined by whether it is growing. The idea that numerical growth automatically indicates church health is a myth.

A healthy person (a physical organism) is one who can accomplish normal activities with a minimum of outside support or help, according to the stage of life. We do not expect a four-month old baby to walk, talk, or feed itself. But we know something is wrong when the same child, four years of age, is still unable to walk, talk, or feed itself. Likewise, a healthy church (a spiritual organism) is one that can fulfill God's purpose and mission with a minimum of outside help. A healthy church can make biblical decisions (is self-directed), can function by itself (is self-edified and self-reliant), and can fulfill God's missionary purpose (is self-duplicating).

Because the church is composed of many members, a healthy church depends on spiritually healthy members. No better measure of spiritual health exists than to evaluate the spiritual maturity of the members. Do the members of the church model and reflect genuine discipleship?

Discipleship is the determinant of true spiritual health. When Pastor Cho succeeded in establishing a very large cell-based church in South Korea, numerical growth was associated with small groups or cells. As various megachurches have come and gone, numerical growth has been associated with numerous other factors.

When methods are cloned with the hope of numerical growth, most often growth is placed ahead of church health. Focusing on methods almost always assures that values and principles are left behind. When numerical growth is the primary goal or motivation, values and principles are weakened. When principles and values are emphasized, numerical growth follows and is sustainable.

If you had to choose, a small church with mature disciples would be preferable to a megachurch with few or no authentic disciples. A healthy church is composed of committed disciples and grows in number! When healthy disciples are being formed, the church will grow numerically! Principles and values are the way to a healthy church with healthy members who are genuine Christ-followers. I repeat a favorite saying: "When you make a church, you seldom get disciples; when you make disciples, you always get a church." I would add, "when you make disciples, you always get a healthy, growing church."