

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF HOLISTIC CONGREGATIONS

The church is God's chosen vessel for modeling and sharing the Good News of Christ in our world. There is an indescribable quality about a church committed to living out the gospel that whispers to your spirit: Yes, this is how Christ meant his followers to live together. The church may not be perfect-come to think of it, no church is!-and the vision may not be fully realized, but the active presence of the Spirit can be felt, bringing renewal, growth, and transformation both within the church and out in the community. Such a community of believers is spiritually dynamic, sacrificially caring, boldly prophetic and lovingly nurturing. We call this a holistic congregation.

Holistic congregations can take many forms, but they share certain attributes in common. Here we summarize four main characteristics of a holistic congregation: dynamic spirituality, healthy congregational dynamics, a holistic understanding of church's mission, and holistic ministry practice.

1. Dynamic spirituality

2. The holistic church:

- Centers congregational life around passionate worship of the triune God, celebrating salvation by grace through faith in Christ, and relying on the power of God's Spirit for fruitful ministry.
- Is led by the inspired and authoritative Word of God, and grounded in the teachings of historic Christian orthodoxy.
- Nurtures individual members in a deepening spiritual life of worship, prayer, study, and mutual discipleship.
- Shares God's self-sacrificial love for the lost, lonely, and broken, and cultivates a commitment toward outreach as an expression of worship.

3. Healthy congregational dynamics

4. The holistic church:

- Nurtures loving, accountable, reconciling relationships within the congregation.
- Identifies and engages the full range of spiritual gifts present in the congregation.
- Selects and upholds church leaders with vision, courage, integrity, and a passion for holistic mission, who train and empower church members in ministry.
- Places every area of individual and congregational life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, without distinction between "sacred" and "secular."

5. Holistic understanding of the church's mission

6. The holistic church:

- Pursues a ministry vision that integrates discipleship, evangelism, and social action, desiring to see both spiritual and social transformation.
- Recognizes both individual and systemic sources of and solutions to human problems.
- Supports a spectrum of social action that includes charity, compassion, community development, justice and public policy.
- Views mission as both local and global in scope.

7. **Holistic ministry practice**

8. The holistic church:

- Relies on the power of God's Spirit for fruitful ministry.
- Nurtures relationships with ministry recipients and welcomes them into church fellowship.
- Ministers with a spirit of sacrificial servanthood and humility.
- Seeks unity in ministry with other expressions of the body of Christ, and serves alongside all through whom God is at work in the world.

Adapted from Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson and Heidi Rolland Unruh, *Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002).