

## **Tool #6: Qualities 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, love and serve together. The church may not be perfect, 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 extending into the community. Such a body of believers is spiritually dynamic, lovingly nurturing, sacrificially caring and boldly prophetic. 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.

**Dynamic spirituality:** 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 is grounded in the teachings of historic Christian orthodoxy.
- Nurtures members in a deepening spiritual life of worship, prayer, study, and mutual discipleship.
- Shares God's self-sacrificial love for those who are lost, lonely, vulnerable and broken, and cultivates a commitment toward outreach as an expression of worship.

**Healthy congregational dynamics:** The holistic church ...

- Nurtures loving, accountable, reconciling relationships within the congregation, intentionally working toward oneness in Christ across worldly divisions such as class and race.
- 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."

**Holistic understanding of the church's mission:** The holistic church ...

- Pursues a ministry vision that integrates discipleship, evangelism, and social action, working toward a kingdom vision that brings together spiritual and social transformation.
- Recognizes both individual and systemic sources of and solutions to human problems.
- Supports a spectrum of involvement, going beyond relief to community development and justice.
- Sees mission as both local and global (caring for neighbors across the street and around the world).

**Holistic ministry practice:** The holistic church ...

- Relies on the power of God's Spirit for fruitful outreach, modeling ministry after Christ's example rather than the values of the world.
- Nurtures relationships of mutual respect with those who are served in ministry and welcomes (but not coerces) them into church fellowship.
- Ministers in a spirit of authentic love and servant-leadership, seeking to come alongside the community as a friend rather than a hero.
- Pursues unity in ministry with other expressions of the body of Christ, and serves alongside all through whom God is at work in the world.