



# NCD Sample Pages: *Color Your World with NCD*

This is a low resolution PDF export of sample pages from the book *Color Your World with Natural Church Development* by Christian A. Schwarz. You may view them online, but are also invited to download them to your hard disk or print them out for reading on paper.

The sample pages contain the table of contents, the introduction and sample pages from the first chapter. These pages present a part of the theoretical basis that the remaining five chapters help to put into practice. These pages may give you an idea of the character and layout of the book, so that you can decide whether it is useful for your purposes.

The book is available in a number of different language editions. You can order it in your preferred language from one of our NCD Partners. The full list of language editions and contact information to NCD Partners around the globe is available at:

**[www.ncd-international.org](http://www.ncd-international.org)**

The American version can be ordered from ChurchSmart Resources: **[orders@churchsmart.com](mailto:orders@churchsmart.com)**

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# Color Your World with Natural Church Development

Table  
of contents

An invitation to join a global movement ..... 5



## Chapter 1: Explore the Second Chapter of NCD 8

Your dream church .....	10
Startling results from 70 countries .....	12
The NCD Story .....	14
“I have done NCD” .....	17
What is your favorite growth pattern? .....	19
Natural Church Development and spiritual unity .....	23
The qualitative approach—often criticized, seldom understood .....	25
Why we need to learn from other cultures .....	28
NCD in an age of hype .....	33
Who is your hero: David or Goliath? .....	36
Why all of us need to check our “spiritual glasses” .....	39
Information, application, transformation—what’s needed most? ...	41



## Chapter 2: The Trinitarian Compass 44

My personal “trinitarian pilgrimage” .....	46
The center of theology .....	48
You can reflect God’s light .....	49
How God communicates with you .....	51
Let’s strive for spiritual balance .....	54
The New Jerusalem—descending to earth .....	56
Why Christianity is in such a bad state today .....	58
What you can learn from green churches .....	60
What you can learn from red churches .....	62
What you can learn from blue churches .....	64
Five rules of the Trinitarian Compass .....	66
The Trinitarian Compass and the doctrine of the Trinity .....	69
The NCD Color Profile .....	72
Your spiritual roadmap .....	77



## Chapter 3: The Principles 80

Principles—the inflation of a term .....	82
Understanding “all by itself” growth .....	84
Two different sets of principles .....	87
Six growth forces .....	89
Growth force 1: Interdependence .....	92
Growth force 2: Multiplication .....	94
Growth force 3: Energy transformation .....	96
Growth force 4: Sustainability .....	98

Growth force 5: Symbiosis .....	100
Growth force 6: Fruitfulness .....	102
Eight quality characteristics .....	104
Quality characteristic 1: Empowering leadership .....	106
Quality characteristic 2: Gift-based ministry .....	108
Quality characteristic 3: Passionate spirituality .....	110
Quality characteristic 4: Effective structures .....	112
Quality characteristic 5: Inspiring worship service .....	114
Quality characteristic 6: Holistic small groups .....	116
Quality characteristic 7: Need-oriented evangelism .....	118
Quality characteristic 8: Loving relationships .....	120
How to apply these principles .....	122



**Chapter 4: The Minimum Factor**

**124**

Where the minimum factor applies—and where it doesn't .....	126
Learning from a potted plant .....	128
The image of the minimum barrel .....	130
Application 1: Quality characteristics .....	132
Application 2: Trinitarian Compass .....	135
The minimum factor within a minimum factor .....	138
Minimum factors of denominations .....	140
Minimum factors of whole cultures .....	142
Why I like to disappoint expectations .....	144



**Chapter 5: The Tools**

**146**

“Do we really need these tools?” .....	148
The basic NCD books .....	150
The NCD Survey .....	152
NCD Discipleship Resources .....	155
NCD National Partners .....	158
NCD International .....	160
The NCD Web Sites .....	162
The NCD Campaign .....	164



**Chapter 6: Your Starting Point**

**166**

Identify your starting point .....	168
Strive for balance in your own life .....	173
Invest in a more balanced church .....	176
Your next step .....	182
<b>Appendix:</b>	
Suggestions for studying this book within an NCD Campaign .....	184

# An invitation to join a global movement

## Introduction

**Y**ou cannot apply for membership to this community, nor can you support it by donations. It's a community that functions without committees and charismatic gurus, that has neither a public relations nor a fund raising department. It's a community whose foundations are exclusively based on biblical principles, research findings, and personal relationships. Doesn't sound like an impressive enterprise so far, does it?

However, this community is mushrooming. Over the past seven years, it has established roots in more than 40,000 churches. To date, 70 countries have decided to launch their own national branches. And millions of Christians have discovered what this community is all about: drawing people closer to the triune God, helping them experience all that God has in store for them and, as a natural side effect, seeing numerical growth within the church as a whole.

### The NCD Community

The name of this community is hardly ever mentioned, and yet there is a name. It's the *NCD Community*. NCD stands for Natural Church Development, the label for an approach to the Christian life—both on an individual and corporate level—that combines fundamental biblical principles with insights that have been brought to light by the most comprehensive church growth research that has ever been done.

NCD is a truly international community; it's neither western nor oriental, neither typical of the northern nor the southern hemisphere of this world. It's an intercultural learning experience. In the same way, the NCD Community is truly interdenominational. It's neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic, neither Baptist nor Pentecostal, neither Lutheran nor Presbyterian, neither mainline nor independent, or we could say: It's all of this, and much more. There are countless Christians representing all of these different denominations who have applied NCD to their own theological and spiritual traditions and have experienced highly encouraging results.

### How to join the movement

Right from the outset, I want to make the purpose of this book crystal clear. I would like to persuade you to join this community, if you should sense that you are not already a part of it. How can you join? No application form, no registration, no fees. You join this community simply by sharing its principles. And you share its principles, not by verbal affirmation, but by applying them to your personal life and to the life of your church.

However, I have one warning: Once you have joined this community, it will be difficult for you to leave it, since that would require that you

The NCD principles are the paint; the NCD tools are the brush. I invite you to pick up the brush and begin painting.



no longer apply the very principles that will have brought a new level of effectiveness to your personal life and to the life of your church. Throughout the course of this book, you will discover why these principles are so powerful: They are not made by humans, but created by God himself.

**The principles apply to your personal context, to your sphere of influence, to your world.**



### **My experiences:**

*Throughout this book, you will see this headline. In these spaces I will share experiences that I have gained in my own ministry, usually as a part of NCD conferences. Outside the context of this book, many of these experiences may seem meaningless, but their purpose here is to illustrate some of the principles that are dealt with in the main text. They will help reinforce the fact that NCD has not been developed in front of a computer screen, but in the midst of personal interactions with Christians of many diverse backgrounds.*

### **What are universal principles?**

Over the past few years, I have repeatedly experienced a serious communication problem. The expression “universal principles” is a term that is loaded with positive emotions for me. Numerous encounters with many wonderful Christians on all six continents instantly flash through my memory. The sheer mention of this term brings to mind many of their faces, their stories, and the victories and sorrows that we have shared in so many different settings.

However, when I use this term in my lectures, hardly anyone in the audience shares my enthusiasm. For the majority of them, it is just another abstract term: blood-less, scientific, high and dry. There are no inner pictures, no faces, no stories that come to mind.

### **Shifting to the Second Chapter**

When the original book, *Natural Church Development*, was published in December 1996, it couldn’t refer to the NCD Community, since at that time NCD did not yet exist as a global movement. The book could only present our initial research findings in the form of principles.

Now the situation has changed. By God’s grace, NCD has advanced from the abstractness of global principles to the vibrant life of a global movement. The consequences are far-reaching: Research findings deal with correlation coefficients; movements deal with people. Research findings present numbers; within a movement we see faces. Research findings verify or falsify theses; in a movement we tell stories. This shift is what we call the *Second Chapter of NCD*.

### **What’s different?**

*Color Your World with Natural Church Development* covers the same basic content as the original book. The most important new features of the book you are holding in your hands are the following:

- It approaches NCD primarily from the individual believer’s point of view rather than limiting itself to the pastor’s perspective.
- It takes the application of the NCD principles to a personal level, not just to a church or small group level.



*Natural Church Development means people meeting, interacting, learning, praying: Leaders from all six continents at the 2004 NCD World Summit in Pretoria, South Africa.*

- It places the *Trinitarian Compass*—that has since become a chief tool for implementing NCD—at the center of every chapter.
- It explicitly emphasizes the benefits of an inter-cultural approach that, probably more than any other feature, has become a hallmark of NCD.

In this new book, I want to share with you as much as possible of what I have been privileged to learn over the past nine years. I hope that I can also communicate the overwhelming joy that it has been for me to work alongside so many different Christians within the NCD Community.

### **Color Your World**

I have chosen the title, *Color Your World with Natural Church Development*. The underlying metaphor is that the NCD principles are the paint, the NCD tools (such as this book) are the brush. Now that the paint and the brush are at your disposal, I invite you to discover which colors are most needed, pick up your brush and begin painting.

This book is about painting *your world*. Sure, NCD was originally formulated as the result of a search for universal principles of church growth, but it would be misleading to reduce the applicability of NCD principles to the church. They are equally applicable to the lives of individual believers. They apply to your personal context, to your sphere of influence, to *your world*. And if your sphere of influence is a small group or a denomination or the political life of a whole country, then these are the areas where the NCD principles apply.

After all, what is the church? The church is people. What determines the health of a church? The health of the heads, hands, and hearts of those people. How can we enhance the health of a church? By enhancing the health of our heads, hands, and hearts. The results? Growing churches that fulfill their God-given purpose, that develop their own individuality, that influence and transform society. I would like to see you as a part of that movement.

Together in His service,  
Christian A. Schwarz

### **More on the web:**

*Wherever you see this headline, you will find a list of additional questions that are not directly dealt with in this book. By inserting your **access code** (provided on page 162) you can log onto the web page, [www.ncd-international.org/community](http://www.ncd-international.org/community) to find answers to these questions. You will also find additional information related to the topics of this book.*

*At the end of each section, you will find a question for personal reflection inside this yellow box.*

*Christian*



## Chapter 1

# Your dream church

If I were sitting next to you now, it wouldn't take long for me to figure out how you feel about the concepts of "church growth" or "church development." Even without putting your feelings into words, I would probably be able to detect them from watching your eyes, observing your gestures, and listening to the sound of your voice. This sort of information would be extremely helpful to me given the topic I want to share with you in this book.

Many of us don't have any mental pictures of what a healthy church looks like.



## Mixed feelings

If you were to share your feelings with me, what would they be? If you are like most Christians I have met, the term "church development" probably does not bring strong enthusiastic emotions to the surface. It's not unlikely that you share the same skepticism that I frequently encounter with other people when discussing this topic. Many of us have the vague suspicion that when we talk about church development, we are referring to some sort of marketing gimmick or manipulative, pushy method... that our emphasis is on quantity... that we are trying to copy a successful model church... that we are about to import an approach that doesn't really fit our own culture... that we are hoping to implement some successful pastor's pet ideas that have nothing to do with the reality in our own churches.

If these are your feelings, I assure you that I agree with you 100 percent. Those approaches do indeed exist, and my own feelings toward them are not different from yours.

## Just imagine...

However, I would like to invite you to perform a brief mental exercise. Imagine that there was an approach to church growth that didn't sport the latest marketing trick, but that was built on a sound **theological foundation** that you could identify with, and that this theological compass permeated even the most practical aspects of church life. Imagine that this approach was not focused on quantity (more people, higher numbers), but that it held **quality** at the center of all considerations.

Imagine an approach to church growth that doesn't copy a model church, but is focused on developing a church's **individuality** and releasing its God-given creativity. Imagine that this approach doesn't export features from one specific culture, but strives to create an **inter-cultural** learning experience, in which all cultures give and take.

Imagine an approach to church growth that doesn't simply promote the favorite ideas of some successful leader, but is

## My experiences:

*At the start of NCD conferences, I like to invite the participants to close their eyes and recall a situation in which they have felt completely happy and relaxed. When asking for feedback, usually more than 80 percent indicate that some mental image has come to their mind: a walk on the beach, sitting with friends in a pub, enjoying a candlelight dinner with their spouse. Then I ask them to close their eyes again, and take note of the images that come to mind when they think of a "healthy church." The result? The majority have not been able to come up with any mental pictures related to this concept. Obviously, nothing of this kind has been stored in the memory of most Christians.*



*Any church, no matter how unfavorable its present situation, can expect considerable increase in quality and quantity. To start such a process, there is only one precondition: a longing for God to manifest himself more strongly in the life of a church.*

based on the comprehensive **research** of thousands of churches around the globe. That communicates truly universal **principles**. That helps you fulfill your own dreams for your church. That is fun to be involved in. Wouldn't you be curious to learn more about it?

### **The core of NCD**

The features I have just mentioned are, in fact, the very center of what I have chosen to call Natural Church Development. It is a privilege for me to invite you to join millions of other believers from 70 countries who have already begun this journey and are experiencing highly promising results.

Working with so many churches in so many different settings, I have learned that there is no precondition either you or your church has to fulfill in order to commence this journey. Whether you are a mature believer or still unexperienced in your Christian faith; whether you have adopted an orthodox theology or find yourself on the other end of the theological spectrum; whether you are a member of a quickly growing church or a congregation that has been in decline for decades; whether you are an advocate of one of the famous model churches or you are hesitant to jump on their bandwagon—the principles outlined in this book will help you experience greater effectiveness both in your personal life and in the life of your church.

Are there truly no preconditions to getting started? Actually, there is *one*. There must be a longing in your heart to experience more of what God has in store for you and your church. If you don't have this longing, this book will not speak to you. However, if you do, you have all you need to begin a journey that could well become one of the most adventurous undertakings of your life. Let's link arms and travel together.

*What would your ideal of a healthy church look like? Which details would be important for you?*



# Startling results from 70 countries

**A**s of the writing of this book, 40,000 churches have participated—with differing levels of intensity—in the NCD process. Since all of them have conducted at least one NCD Survey (which means that 30 members have completed a detailed questionnaire) we have the data of most of these churches in our computers and are able to monitor their actual results, both in terms of quality and quantity.

## 51% increase of the growth rate

Recently we selected all of the churches that have done three NCD Surveys and compared their initial numbers (at the time of their first survey) with

their most recent results (at the time of their third survey, which was completed, on average, 31 months later). At the time of the third survey, the quality of these churches had increased by an average of 6 points. Later in this book, I will explain what these points mean. For the time being, it's enough to know that they indicate considerably more love, more forgiveness, more answers to prayer, more wisdom, more spiritual power, and countless other quality factors in those churches. Great.

But what about the quantity? Did the focus on church quality actually result in numerical growth, as NCD claims it does? Here are the results. By the time of the third survey the average growth rate of all participating churches had increased by 51%. If a church had been growing at a rate of 10 people per year before beginning the process, 31 months into the process, that number had grown to 15 people per year; if there had been 200 people per year joining the church previously, now there were 302. In addition, due to the NCD process, the percentage of transfer growth decreased, while the percentage of conversion growth increased. These results are illustrated in the diagram on page 13. The upper part of the right bar symbolizes the additional growth experienced due to the NCD process.

## How many people?

If you study the diagram, the whole topic might still appear rather abstract. However, you shouldn't forget that the bars of this diagram represent individual people—most of them who didn't know Christ previously and came into a personal relationship with him. According to our calculations, we can assume that by now approximately 1.3 million individuals have joined these churches as a direct consequence of the NCD process. A closer look at these 1.3 million people reveals that they are very special people, as the following three criteria apply to all of them.

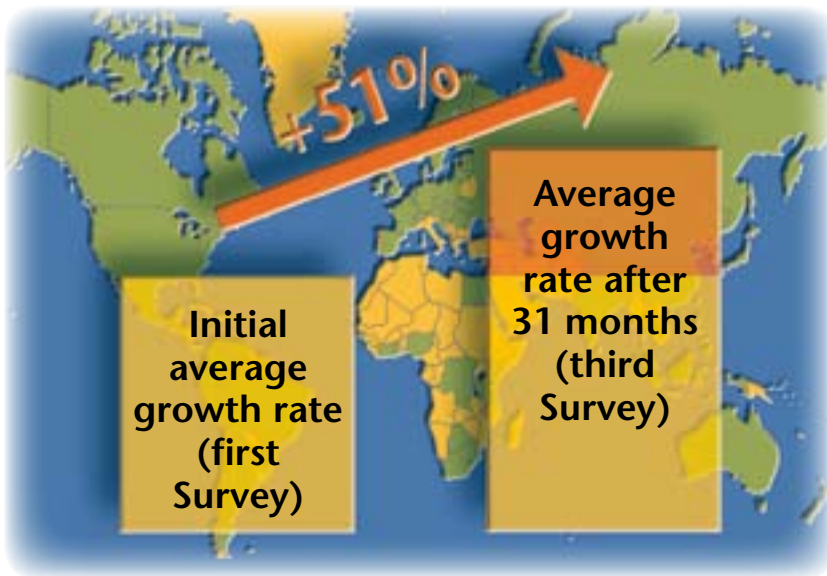
1. The number 1.3 million is not the overall growth of the churches that have invested themselves in the NCD process (that number is considerably higher), but just the *additional* growth that occurred after they started to apply NCD principles consciously.

After eight years of NCD, we can see a breakthrough in terms of people joining the church.



## My experiences:

*For me personally, it's an exhilarating experience to learn from the data we have collected, since they show us how church development actually functions in real life, regardless of our own theories. As the data of all surveyed churches contain 168 million individual responses and encompass an enormous variety of different cultures, denominations, and theological persuasions, it enables our team to base our conclusions on a solid foundation.*



The average growth rate of all of the churches that did a third NCD Survey, increased by 51%. At the time of this writing (June 2005) this has resulted in 1.3 million additional people who have joined the participating churches as a consequence of applying NCD principles.

2. As the quality of these churches grew substantially over the same time frame, these new members are members of “high quality” churches. As everyone who has experienced first-hand the effects of the qualitative approach can affirm, members of higher quality churches live very different lives than members of lower quality churches.
3. All of these 1.3 million people are incorporated in a local church. According to all serious studies on evangelistic outreach that I have seen so far, it’s realistic to assume that only between 15% (in the best-case scenario) and 0.3% (in the worst-case scenario) of people who give their lives to Christ in the context of an evangelistic campaign will be members of a local church one year later. In NCD we only count those people who are involved in a local church. Just for the sake of comparison: In order to win 1.3 million people applying “classic procedures,” we would have to get “decisions” of between 8.5 million people (in the best case) and 433 million people (in the worst case).

#### More on the web:

On the internet (see page 162) you will find answers to the following questions:

- How much of NCD growth is conversion growth, how much is simply transfer growth?
- How has the 51% increase been measured?

#### What the figures stand for

Figures, figures, figures. Perhaps I should stop here. Much more interesting than the figures themselves is studying how they came about. The quantitative growth was a natural side effect of these churches’ attempts to grow in quality. This growth in quality has released an almost magnetic attraction, enabling them to experience what Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 3:6: We plant, we water. But God gives the increase.

*What strategy does your church follow to win people to Christ? What have the results been so far?*

# What is your favorite growth pattern?

## Chapter 1

It is difficult to appreciate what NCD is all about without fully understanding what we mean by a “principle-oriented approach” to church development. Because different groups associate different meanings with this concept, let me clarify what we mean by it in Natural Church Development.

### Four criteria of a principle-oriented approach

A principle-oriented approach to church development fulfills the following four criteria:

1. Principles are **universally valid**. They don’t apply only to certain situations or specific circumstances. They apply to all denominations, to all church models, to all devotional styles, and to all cultures.
2. Principles must be **proven**. Until we have clear empirical proof, we may be dealing with an interesting concept that is worth consideration, but we shouldn’t speak about a principle. There is only one way to find out whether or not a specific feature is a universal principle: research on a universal (i.e. worldwide) scale.
3. Principles always deal with what is **essential**, never with secondary aspects of the Christian life. Therefore, we can expect to find the principles that influence our lives also described in the Bible, even if the terminology is different.
4. Principles always have to be **individualized**. They never tell you exactly what to do. Rather, they give you criteria that enable you to discover what should be done in a given situation.

Not all contributions to church growth are based on a principle-oriented approach. Over the past few years, I have encountered four different patterns that, in some ways, overlap with a principle-oriented approach. I call them the faithfulness pattern, the breakthrough pattern, the model pattern, and the management pattern.

### The faithfulness pattern

The faithfulness pattern focuses on a very important aspect of the Christian life. Advocates of this approach rightly stress that we must be faithful, for instance, to the Word of God and to the gifts God has entrusted us with. “No matter how ‘successful’ a certain method may be, if it’s not in line with Scripture, we are not interested.” NCD holds this same position.

But representatives of the faithfulness pattern go one step further. They tend to reduce *everything* to faithfulness. When it comes to church development, their motto is, “All we have to do is adopt a specific theology, moral code, form of worship service, political position, etc.” According to this view, church health is determined by simply sticking to what a specific group defines as the core of faithfulness. The most radical adherents to this approach do not even deem it necessary for a church to grow.

A principle-oriented approach is based on the assumption that every church has its God-given individuality.



**Many Christians are waiting for a breakthrough, but are unaware of the dynamics that make such a breakthrough likely to happen.**



### **My experiences:**

*Ten years ago the distinction between a principle and a model-oriented approach was not even an established category. This has radically changed, and I attribute it, at least in part, to our contributions to the discussion on church development. At the beginning of the NCD ministry, I often heard that people had difficulty with the fact that I am not a local pastor (a typical concern that arises from a model-driven mentality, where the expectation was that I would promote the model of my home church). In the past five years, however, I haven't heard this criticism one single time. I take this as another sign that people are beginning to grasp what a principle-oriented approach is all about.*

### **The breakthrough pattern**

The second pattern, which I call the breakthrough pattern, is especially widespread among charismatic groups, but not limited to them. In most cases, the awaited breakthrough is a revival. Since revivals are God-given and advance the kingdom tremendously, all of us should be praying for revival and do our best to prepare our churches for it. That is what we are committed to do in NCD.

But once again, representatives of the breakthrough pattern tend to take it one step further. Many of them diminish the relevance of the down-to-earth activities that are the very foundation upon which a revival can flourish (for instance, working on all of the quality characteristics of a healthy church). Some groups hold the assumption that if you attend a specific conference, are baptized in the Spirit, follow a certain leader, or apply a successful prayer technique, you will bring about a breakthrough in your church. The desire for a spiritual breakthrough is often pitted against long-term, process-driven, principle-oriented contributions to church development.

### **The model pattern**

A third widespread pattern of church growth is the model pattern. Generally, a model-oriented approach can be very powerful. Model churches enable you to encounter the principles of church development by dealing with concrete case studies. There is much to be learned from church models. In fact, everything that I have learned about church development stems from concrete models, they may encompass 30 or 3000 people, they may be found in the Western world or in Asia, Africa, or Latin America. What else should model churches be than churches that display extraordinarily high quality? Studying these kinds of churches is exactly what we do in NCD research.

Representatives of the model pattern, however, go a step further. Rather than dealing with many different models they focus on one single church model. Even when they talk about principles ("Don't imitate the model, but follow the principles!"), they usually mean something different than what we mean by this concept in NCD. They are referring to the principles *behind their specific model* rather than the principles that apply to any church model in any culture.

### **The management pattern**

The management pattern seeks to transfer insights from the business world to the sphere of the church. Since a lot of business techniques are nothing other than social sciences

## Five church growth patterns or only two?

- A**
1. Faithfulness
  2. Breakthrough
  3. Model
  4. Management

- B**
5. Principles

*This table summarizes the five church growth patterns mentioned in this chapter. It also reveals that we are not really speaking of five different categories, but only two (A and B).*

applied to specific organizations, this is a legitimate approach. Many Christians would be well advised to learn from the business world.

But representatives of the management pattern tend to reduce church development completely to business techniques. They may still refer to the Holy Spirit, but for all practical purposes he is no longer needed. Business techniques have taken his place. In these groups people fail to see that not every management method is applicable in the church. Many of these techniques are not as “neutral” as it is often assumed. Rather, they are based on a distinct concept of humanity that sometimes contradicts the biblical concept.

### **The principle-oriented approach**

Look at the diagram at top of this page. I have placed the four patterns that I have just discussed in box A, and the principle-oriented approach in box B. This diagram communicates that we are not actually dealing with five different patterns, but that the decisive distinction is between paradigm A (patterns 1-4) and paradigm B (pattern 5). The principle-oriented approach seeks to integrate the truths behind each of the four patterns mentioned above, while avoiding their one-sided views.

It is helpful to take a look at different movements and ask yourself which of the five approaches they reflect. Take, for instance, a widespread Lutheran view (you will find similar patterns in other denominations as well): “Our only contribution to church development is proclaiming the Word and administering the sacraments.” What kind of pattern does this reflect? You have probably guessed correctly: the faithfulness pattern. Or, which pattern is most widespread in the charismatic movement? It’s the breakthrough pattern, sometimes mixed with elements of other patterns.

To make things more concrete, let’s take a look at a famous model church, Willow Creek. For those of you who haven’t heard of it, Willow Creek is

an evangelical church in the United States, planted by Bill Hybels and famous for its seeker-sensitive worship services. Countless church leaders around the globe have been inspired by the ministry of Willow Creek and have sought to build similar churches in their own contexts.

**NCD seeks to integrate the truths behind each of the different patterns, while avoiding their one-sided views.**



### **Where does Willow Creek fit in?**

Which of the five patterns is at the root of Willow Creek? Be careful, the answer is not as obvious as it might appear at first sight. When I ask this question in conferences, the first reaction is usually to put Willow Creek into the “model” category. However, you should take a closer look at the original Willow Creek Church in South Barrington, Illinois. Is it a model-oriented church? In no way. Bill Hybels doesn’t follow another church model, but clearly seeks God’s calling for himself and his church. Willow Creek has become so successful because they have applied universal principles to the challenges of their specific cultural context. In other words, Bill Hybels has followed paradigm B.

Many of the churches that try to imitate Willow Creek today, however, have actually adopted the model pattern and are following paradigm A. They are in danger of missing the very secret that has made Willow Creek so successful: applying a “paradigm B approach.” Do you really want to learn from Willow Creek? Then learn that they never imitated the model of another church.

### **Models and principles**

Let’s assume you are following a certain church model. Do I want to convince you to give that up? By no means. Rather, my desire is to draw your attention to *why* some model churches have become successful: Consciously or unconsciously they have applied the universal principles of church development. That’s the secret of their success.

You can look at extremely different models. Compare for instance, Willow Creek and the house church movement. One model is focused on a megachurch; the other teaches that no church should have more than 20 members. One model prides itself in spectacular buildings; in the other, no church buildings are allowed. One model is characterized by a large staff; the other, as a matter of principle, has no full-time workers. One model has a high view of professionalism; in the other, professionalism is almost regarded as a sin.

These are huge differences indeed. What do these two models have in common? And what do they share with countless other wonderful church models? Nothing other than the principles that we have chosen to call Natural Church Development.

### **More on the web:**

On the internet (see page 162) you will find answers to the following questions:

- *Is there any church model that, from an NCD point of view, is superior to others?*
- *Is it better to apply NCD principles with or without the help of a specific church model?*

*Which of the five patterns mentioned in this chapter has influenced you the most?*

# Why we need to learn from other cultures

Throughout this book, you will encounter the inter-cultural character of the NCD paradigm. Within our network of NCD National Partners, we distinguish three cultural poles: the West, the East, and the South (see diagram on page 29).

Of course, the diversity within these cultural zones is as abundant as it is between them, since each of them encompasses many diverse languages, customs, histories, and thought patterns. Nevertheless, each cultural zone has characteristic tendencies. This doesn't mean that every individual within each zone displays those characteristics, but it does mean that the percentage of individuals within a given zone who display those characteristics is higher than in the other zones. It's extremely beneficial to take a closer look at each of the three cultural poles.

The very aspects lacking in one culture are provided by another.



## My experiences:

*We frequently receive letters and e-mails directed to the German NCD Partner, and he receives messages directed to us. Obviously, many people assume that since the offices of NCD International are located in Germany, we are the German NCD Partner. However, that is not the case. We have exactly the same relationship to the German NCD Partner as we have to the Egyptian or American or Indonesian partners. We are well aware that most ministry organizations function differently. They treat their international ministries as branches of their national organization and place the international work under the authority of their national leaders. There are good reasons why we decided to follow a different pattern in NCD.*

## The Western pole: Competition

The Western pole encompasses both North America and Europe. (Though Australia is culturally related to the Western world as well, due to its geographical positioning, on the very border between the Eastern and the Southern poles, it has an identity of its own.) When studying Western cultures you will usually find a high view of the individual, of self-realization, and of diversity. Values such as freedom of the individual and personal initiative play a more critical role in the Western world than they do in other cultures.

When the two values of freedom and diversity are combined, their synthesis is "competition." While there is competition in other cultures as well, in no other is it viewed as positively as in the West. Whether you look at the economic, the educational, the political, or even the church system, in the Western world you will detect a competitive spirit everywhere.

The prevailing thought pattern in the Western world is linear: cause and effect, input-output, A to B to C. There are many things that can be wonderfully explained by applying linear thinking; but the Western tendency is to apply this thought pattern even when it doesn't fit.

## Danger: Domination

There are strengths in the Western paradigm, and there are weaknesses. One of the most obvious dangers may be the tendency toward "navel-gazing." However, the greatest danger of Western cultures is probably their inherent tendency to dominate others. Is imperialism typical of the Western world? Of course it is. This doesn't imply that every Westerner is, by definition, an imperialist. But even those of us who try to resist imperialistic tendencies have to admit that



*In today's world, we can distinguish three cultural poles: the West, the East, and the South. Each of these poles displays specific characteristics that would be beneficial for the other poles to learn from.*

an imperialistic mind-set has shaped the Western culture as a whole. These tendencies can even be detected in many well-intentioned Christian initiatives.

### **The Eastern pole: Harmony**

The Eastern world, which encompasses most of Asia, functions very differently. Traditionally, these cultures are built on consensus rather than competition. The necessities of rice communities—a form of agriculture that depends to a high degree on the co-operation of the whole village—have shaped many Asian countries. For example, the role of the traditional Indonesian village elder is not to dictate decisions (as it might appear from the outside to Westerners), but to lead the *musyawarah* in a way that encourages dialogue and leads to consensus. That's definitely different than the way the Greek *polis*, which provided the model for Western democracy, used to function.

The different expressions that Asian languages use for peace—such as *wa* in Japanese, *guanxi* in Chinese, or *inhwa* in Korean—are not only different words, but quite different concepts. What they have in common,

**In NCD, we strive to relate the characteristic insights of different cultures to each other.**



**My experiences:**

*One of the principles that guides my ministry is to focus on those elements that a given group most needs, rather than what the group most likes. When speaking in Western countries, for instance, I deliberately focus on the characteristics that Western churches are most lacking, incorporating the insights that we can gain from the Southern and Eastern parts of the world. The same holds true for ministry in Eastern or Southern countries. I am aware that this is contrary to how most people would do things. They would focus on the areas in which a given culture is already strong and would be happy about how “well received” their message was. But I see it as a waste of energy to travel thousands of miles just to tell people the very things at which they are already better than I.*

however, is an extraordinarily high view of harmony, that explains the plentiful forms of politeness that are so typical of Asian cultures. Harmony is also a key term when it comes to the Asian view of nature. While it is characteristic for the West to see nature primarily as something to be conquered, the concept of living in harmony with nature is characteristic in the East. In most Asian cultures bi-polar thought structures, such as *yin* and *yang*, prevail, and striving for a “middle road” is usually a high cultural value.

**Danger: Copying others**

One of my Korean friends recently told me, “You Westerners have copyrights, while we Asians have a right to copy.” This was meant as a joke, of course, but even with this joke he communicated an important cultural insight. Asian cultures can be great at copying others—in the positive sense. On the negative side, a “copy mentality” can result in a lack of individuality and a neglect of creativity.

As you know, in NCD the distinction between a model and a principle-oriented approach plays a central role. Without a doubt, the model-oriented approach has a stronger affinity to Eastern thought patterns, while the principle-oriented approach can be seen as a typically Western contribution to the worldwide discussion on church development. And I would explicitly like to add that this is a valuable contribution that will benefit non-Western cultures as well.

**The South: Solidarity**

What is a common denominator of the Southern hemisphere that encompasses such different parts of the world as Latin America and Africa? It’s certainly not an accident that on these continents we find the two concepts of “liberation theology” and “African theology.” In spite of all of their differences, these continents have one experience in common: suffering. Much of the way Africans and Latin Americans think has originated as a response to suffering. Among the Christians of the Southern hemisphere, we frequently encounter a high view of the Old Testament, creation, and the exodus as categories many people can identify with.

When looking for a common denominator that characterizes the South as a whole, the Xhosa word *ubuntu*, which Archbishop Desmond Tutu has placed at the center of his theology, seems to fit best. The concept of *ubuntu*, which is to a certain degree related to the Tanzanian *ujamaa* or the Kenyan *harambee*, is difficult to translate into a Western language. The closest equivalent that I have been able to come up with is the English term *solidarity*.



Each feature of the NCD paradigm displayed in this diagram has an affinity to one of the three cultural poles. This explains why there are some aspects of NCD that people sense as “foreign.” Usually, these are the very issues that are outside of their own cultural comfort zones and at the same time, reflect areas in which they most need to grow. It would be counterproductive to “contextualize them away” in order to make NCD more attractive to a given culture.

*Ubuntu*, however, is far more encompassing than solidarity. There is a famous saying in Xhosa, *Ubuntu ungantu ngabanye abantu*, which can be transcribed to Western thought as follows: Each individual is ideally expressed in relation with others. Or: A person depends on other people to be a person. Or: You only recognize who you are in the mirror of relationship. This definitely expresses a form of group feeling and group loyalty that is virtually unknown to the Western world.

*Ubuntu* has a strong impact on Christianity. While in the Western world many believe that the individualistic approach to evangelism—God on the one hand, your soul on the other hand—is typically biblical, dealing with African or Latin American cultures helps us recognize that this focus on the individual is not typically biblical, but typically Western. The *koinonia* concept of the New Testament and the whole thought structure of the Old Testament, have a close affinity to *ubuntu*.

In the Southern hemisphere, we can detect cyclical ways of thinking that are in contrast to the linear thought structure of the West. Later in this book we will learn how valuable cyclical thinking is in the area of church

**Globalization shouldn't mean that one culture dominates the rest, but that all learn from each other.**



#### More on the web:

On the internet (see page 162) you will find answers to the following questions:

- In which culture does NCD work best?
- What are the political implications of the inter-cultural approach of NCD?

*Which cultural contributions mentioned in this chapter should you explore more?*

development, and why cultures outside of the Southern hemisphere should strive to increase their competence in this area.

#### **Danger: Conformity**

Just as with the other cultural poles, there are limitations to the Southern thought pattern. A pre-occupation with group loyalty can lead to a neglect of personal freedom. It can result in a level of conformity that inhibits the development of people's full potential. And most importantly, it can undermine personal responsibility. If the forces of self-initiative aren't encouraged, the competitiveness of an entire economy suffers. In these areas, Southern cultures can learn from both the East and the West.

#### **The impact on NCD**

In Natural Church Development, we strive to integrate insights from all three cultural poles, and to avoid their pitfalls. The diagram at the top of page 31 shows that each element of the NCD paradigm has an affinity to one of the three cultural poles.

If you are a Westerner, you will most likely have more difficulty with cyclical thinking or "all by itself" growth than your brothers and sisters in the South or the East. The same holds true the other way around. People from non-Western cultures may find it more difficult than Westerners to relate empirical research to church life. There are elements in NCD that will seem more familiar to you, since your culture has prepared you for them, and there are others that will seem relatively "foreign" to you, since they are outside of your cultural comfort zone.

#### **What globalization should be all about**

The diagram on page 31 shows that the lacking aspects of a specific culture are provided by the other cultures. That is the major reason why NCD strives to develop a truly inter-cultural approach. It can be demonstrated that the very answers that are so greatly needed in the churches of one culture have usually already been found in another culture. As long as there is no cultural exchange—or, even worse, an exclusively one-way cultural export—we will never be able to benefit from this reality.

There is a widespread misconception that confuses globalization with the Westernization of the world. This would be nothing other than a form of cultural colonialism without weapons. The true meaning of the term globalization, however, is the opposite: In the global village all cultures learn from one another, all give and all receive. It has been one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life that seeing the world function like this has already become a reality within the worldwide NCD Community.

# NCD in an age of hype

## Chapter 1

**H**aving worked for newspapers for a number of years, I am familiar with the laws of the media. I am aware of the kind of messages that create hype, and the kind that are regarded as irrelevant. The very things that keep the world going usually don't find their way into the media. They don't make for great stories. After all, news is what is different.

When starting our NCD network, we made the decision to ignore the laws of hype: no moving stories, no mass events, no model churches, no one-liners. Many people regarded this as a strategic mistake. A Christian leader told me, "Reality is what is going on in the media. If you are not present in the media, you are simply not a part of reality." I had to disagree. "Reality," I said, "is not what is going on in the media. Reality is what happens in reality, whether or not the media report on it." Many people are so infected by the reality-is-what-happens-in-the-media perspective that they only believe that they are alive if they read it in the newspaper!

### Focus on changing reality

I am aware, of course, that people's view of reality is strongly influenced by the media, and not so much by reality itself. But what is our goal? To change reality, or just to change people's perception of reality? When seriously reflecting on this question, we made an even firmer commitment to invest all of our energies into long-term, principle-oriented, process-based activities—relatively boring to communicate, but incredibly exciting to be a part of.

A journalist is not very interested in how things *normally* function, but in the exceptions to the rule. News is what is different! Let's assume there is a relatively small church that meets in private homes. No extraordinary programs, no church buildings, no full-time staff. Year after year this church applies the principles of church development and experiences steady growth as a result. It even gives birth to four new congregations with about 15 people each. A fantastic *reality*—but not *news*.

### The "mega" trap

Now consider a megachurch with a spectacular program, large buildings, and efficient PR. Even if this church displays only an average quality (according to the NCD Survey) and has been stagnating numerically for years, the media would be more interested in this church than in the one previously mentioned. That is normal, and as a journalist I understand such dynamics well. This church might even be labeled "a growing church" (confusing size with growth) and we

The very things that keep the world going usually don't find their way into the media.



### My experiences:

A denominational leader in Canada once told me that he likes to send pastors of large churches with low quality to do apprenticeships with pastors of small, high-quality churches. One pastor of a 1,200 person church did an apprenticeship in a small church of 65 people. When he applied what he learned to his own church he experienced great results. Many people think this is a joke, but actually, this kind of procedure should be the most natural thing in the world. It can be demonstrated that applying principles to a larger church that have been learned in a smaller church is far easier than the other way around. It's exclusively the "mega" trap ("bigger is better") that doesn't allow for these learning experiences to happen more often.

might read about its high “quality” (confusing quality with professionalism). The laws of hype! “Mega” events are easier to sell than background processes. In the area of news this is a principle, in the area of church development it is a trap. I call it the “mega” trap.

### **Are larger churches better churches?**

Don’t misunderstand me. I am not opposed to *communicating* church-related activities in ways that are appealing to the media. Media support can create a “tail wind” that is helpful for advancing the kingdom of God. But I am very much opposed to focusing our energies on *creating* the kind of reality that appeals to the media. Following that approach, we unconsciously transfer the laws of hype, including the “mega” trap, to the dynamics of church development. And this is what has actually happened. Many Christians are already so deeply embedded in the “mega” trap that they seriously believe that the things the media take notice of are what is most effective for the kingdom of God.

Let me illustrate. One of the most controversial results of our initial NCD research in 32 countries and one thousand churches was that, on average, smaller churches are “better” churches (i.e. churches with measurably higher quality). There are, of course, countless exceptions to the rule, but the rule is this: The larger a church becomes, the worse its quality. The diagram on page 35 presents one example of these dynamics. I could add countless others. Whether we are dealing with the quality of relationships, giving habits, the intensity of prayer, or evangelistic outreach, smaller churches rank considerably higher, on average, than larger ones.

### **Small churches grow 1600% more**

The situation gets even more dramatic when we compare the growth patterns of small and large churches. When we compared all of the churches with less than 100 regular attenders (the average size being 51 worshippers) with all of the churches that have a regular attendance of more than 1,000 (the average being 2,856), the result was striking. We discovered that “small churches” grow 16 times more than megachurches.

When doing such a comparison, we could not compare *one* church of 51 people to *one* of 2,856. We had to compare the results of 56 churches of 51 people each, to one megachurch with 2,856 people to come up with exactly the same number of people, just differently organized. On average, the small church category had a 1,600% higher growth rate. They won 16 times as many people! Interesting results, aren’t they? Small churches really have no reason for a low self-esteem.

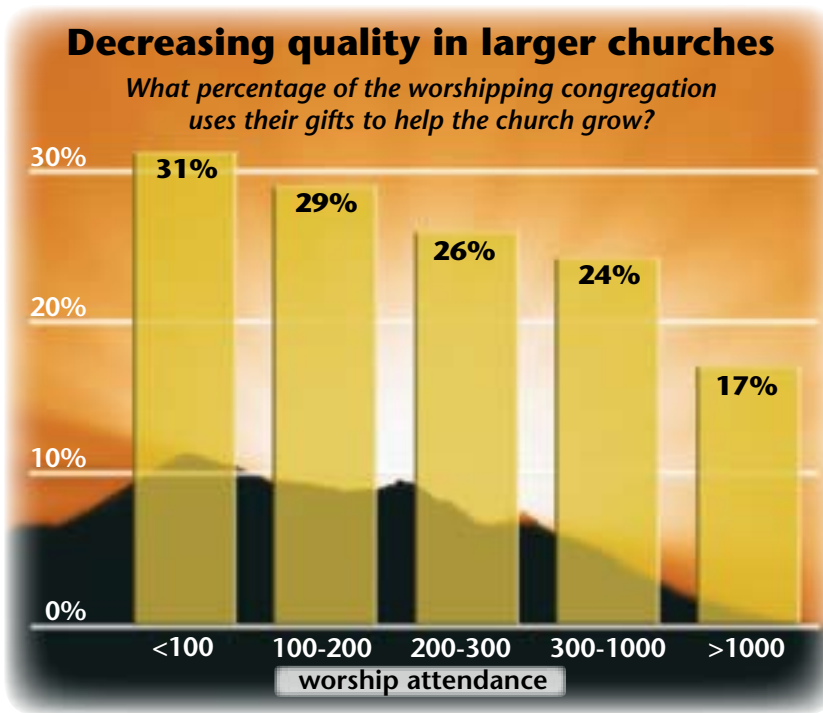
Some people only believe that they are alive if they read it in the newspaper.



### **More on the web:**

On the internet (see page 162) you will find answers to the following questions:

- What are the reasons that larger churches tend to have lower quality?
- What are the unique contributions that large churches make to the body of Christ?



*This diagram illustrates the influence of church size on one of many aspects of church quality, namely the use of gifts. The percentage of people who use their gifts to help the church grow tends to decrease dramatically with church size. Whereas in churches with less than 100 people, 31% of the attenders use their gifts, in churches with more than 1000 people, only 17% use their gifts.*

### Overcoming low self-esteem

But here comes the tragic part of the story. In spite of this empirical evidence, many small churches have an incredibly low self-esteem that has inhibited further growth. I was in touch with one of these churches in Denmark. Their average attendance was 40. "There is not much happening in our church, no new people," the pastor, who worked part-time in a secular business, told me. I asked him how many people had joined the church within the past twelve months. He said, "Only four, but two others left the church." Well, that really didn't sound like an impressive growth rate. "And how many people did you have five years ago?" I asked. "Oh, about the same number," he said, "about 20."

Did you catch what he said? Their church went from 20 to 40 people in five years! If a megachurch of 20,000 grew at that rate, it would have 40,000 attenders in just five years. I don't know if there has ever been a church with such radical numbers, but if there ever should be, I can guarantee that the media would report on "one of the greatest revivals" ever. Now let's go back to our small church in Denmark with its frustrated part-time pastor: They had just experienced the exact same rate of growth that in the other case would be labeled a "mega revival." And yet they had such an incredible inferiority complex. If NCD could help those churches build healthy self-esteem, I think we will have done a fine job.

*In what ways do you sense yourself to be influenced by the "mega trap"?*

# Who is your hero: David or Goliath?

The “mega” trap mentioned in the previous paragraph strongly impacts how we view and measure spiritual results. The danger is that, in the end, we aren’t looking for real results any more, because we believe that a large infrastructure *is* the desired result.

## How do we typically measure success?

When Christian organizations report on their success (I am speaking of para-church organizations, not local churches), they usually refer to items such as those listed in the upper box of the diagram on page 37:

- They give you a financial breakdown of the **money** that has been raised and spent, obviously under the assumption that the more money raised and spent, the more effective the ministry.
- They speak about the **time** that people have invested into different activities (the assumption being that the more time, the better).
- They tell you how many **workers** were employed (the more workers, the more successful the program).
- They let you know if the **organization** has expanded (the larger the organization, the greater the blessing).
- And, finally, they give you the numbers of the people that have been **evangelized and disciplined**.

## A new look at effectiveness

However, are these points really adequate indicators of spiritual success? In my view, only the last point (“people evangelized and disciplined,” where the criteria of a “disciple” includes the dimension of caring for the poor and needy) qualifies as a true, spiritual result. All of the other items are means to the end of achieving this result. Take a look at the two boxes labeled A and B. What most people fail to do is distinguish between *results* (box B) and *measures to achieve a result* (box A). Only when the size of box A contributes to a proportionally larger box B can we say that the measures to achieve a result are successful.

Let’s assume that 25,000 people have participated in a Christian campaign. According to the categories in our diagram, would this be a result (box B) or would it be a measure to achieve a result (box A)? Very clearly it is a measure to achieve a result, a description of the investment, of the cost, so to speak. The decisive question is: What has been achieved by this enormous investment of time? If one year after the campaign the quality of the church has measurably increased and more people than before have found Christ and joined the church, we could rightly label this as a “result” (box B).

People don't admire Goliaths because they are more effective, but for the sheer fact that they are Goliaths.



## My experiences:

At the end of every year I ask the following questions: In which areas can we reduce the size of our organization? What ministries would be better taken care of by others? How can I reduce my personal involvements? I ask these questions because I am interested in contributing to “mega results.” But what I am not interested in is building a “mega organization” that is promoted as the result.

## A new look at effectiveness

### What are spiritual results?

- money raised
- time spent
- workers employed
- organizations enlarged
- people evangelized & disciplined

#### Measures to achieve a result

- money raised
- time spent
- workers employed
- organizations enlarged

#### Results

- people evangelized & disciplined

The upper box shows some features that many Christian organizations would label as "success." A number of people, however, don't distinguish between "results" (box B) and "measures to achieve a result" (box A). Metaphorically speaking, they regard a large box A as an evidence of success.

### Confusing boxes A and B

Large numbers of Christians continually confuse the two boxes. They innocently offer you the numbers of box A and cause you to believe that these are "results." Applying this logic, box A activities don't even have to justify themselves. Since a large box A results in an even larger box A, all we have to do is invest more energy into box A to enlarge box A. This is not a very helpful way of evaluating Christian organizations.

If we continued to follow this logic, meeting a goal with the participation of 20 employees would be superior to reaching the same goal with only one; winning 50 people to Christ with activities that cost \$20,000 would be superior to winning the same number of people with activities that cost \$300; and harvesting 10,000 potatoes with ten bags of fertilizer would be superior to getting the same number of potatoes with only one bag of fertilizer.

### The ratio between A and B is the crucial factor

Let's translate this into the categories of our diagram. A large box A that corresponds to an average-size box B could hardly be considered a "successful infrastructure." However, if we had a tiny box A (only a small amount of money, time, workers, etc.) that corresponded to a large box B, we would have to call this a "super-successful infrastructure." In terms

of success, it's neither the size of box A nor the size of box B that counts. Rather, the ratio between A and B is the crucial factor. It's amazing how few people apply this simple arithmetic. Is it possible that the "mega" trap mentioned earlier has impacted the way we do mathematics?

### David and Goliath

When meditating on this diagram, the story of David and Goliath came to my mind. Many of us are not aware that this story is about two mutually exclusive approaches to life. Do we admire a *David approach* (large box B) or a *Goliath approach* (large box A)? When considering the biblical story, almost everyone answers "David," but in their daily lives they continue to admire the Goliaths of this world.

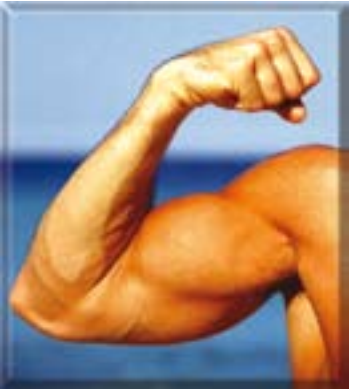
People admire Goliaths, not because they are more effective—in most cases, they aren't—but for the sheer fact that they are Goliaths. A Goliath doesn't have to justify himself, just as a large box A doesn't have to justify itself. But the crucial factor is not how impressive you look, but what you actually achieve. We should not forget that in the biblical story, Goliath was not "better equipped" than David. He was huge, that is true, but at the same time he was far too immobile to be a good fighter. David, on the other hand, fought with divine intelligence. He was better equipped to do his job than Goliath because God had given him all he needed. In NCD we are committed to following the David approach. We have worked hard to develop an approach that reaches the desired results with a minimum amount of infrastructure, at the lowest possible cost.

### Laughing at Goliath?

When I recently used the David-and-Goliath analogy in a conference in New Zealand, one of the participating leaders approached me and said, "You are absolutely right in what you have said, Christian, but you shouldn't say this in public." I was a little bit puzzled and asked, "Why?" He answered, "Because there are a number of Goliaths in this room that might have felt insulted. Typically they are admired by everyone, but now people may start to laugh at them." My reply was, "I agree with you that many people admire the Goliaths and laugh at the Davids. But if the two of us see this as a problem, our

patterns of admiration and laughter have to change." When I first heard the story of David and Goliath—at that time I might have been five years old—I always laughed when I saw Goliath's picture in my Children's Bible. He looked almost ridiculous to me: Such a huge man, such huge armor, and such a poor outcome. Many of my friends reacted the other way around; they felt frightened when they saw Goliath's picture. I still think that I had a deeper understanding of the story than they did.

The crucial factor is not how impressive you look, but what you actually achieve.



### More on the web:

On the internet (see page 162) you will find answers to the following questions:

- What is the difference between a "large organization" and a "Goliath organization"?
- How do "Goliath organizations" view NCD?

In the past, which have you admired more, organizations that display a David, or a Goliath, approach?