

More and Better Churches for Spain ...and the rest of the world

(Jon Haley and Christoph Schalk)

Around 10,000 churches worldwide have now used the NCD profile to analyze the health of their church – enough to discover further correlations between the growth and the quality of churches.

The latest findings of our research look at those churches that have planted other churches. It proves that these churches not only have a higher quality than other churches but they also grow faster.

‘That is nothing new’ some might say. ‘Naturally, churches that plant daughter churches have a higher quality, otherwise they would not have attempted a church plant in the first place.’ Others are more skeptical. ‘Church planting is costly to the mother church in terms of health. It takes too much energy, and members become so involved that in the end the mother church declines.’

We felt it was time to investigate what was actually happening. Several months ago the International Institute for Natural Church Development, in collaboration with its Spanish partner Biolglesia, was able to introduce the results of joint studies. This was a first for Spain.

Spanish studies demonstrate empirical links

Around 4 percent (52 churches) of all evangelical communities in Spain were examined (Gypsy churches were not included in this initial study due to cultural differences). In spite of the apparently small figure, these churches are representative of the whole in a statistically relevant way.

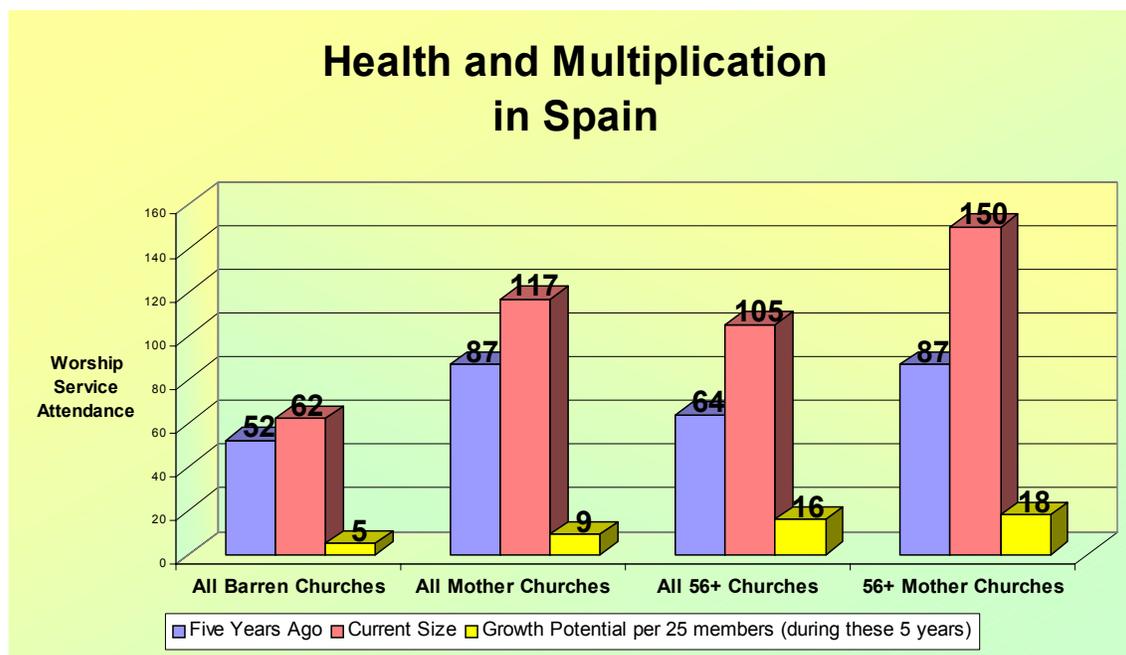
For the research, the churches were split into different groups, namely:

1. Churches that had never planted daughter churches to date.
2. Churches that had already planted at least one new church.
3. Churches with higher quality characteristics (e.g. All churches with an average score of 56+ in all eight characteristics; *Natural Church Development*, C&P 1996).
4. Churches with higher quality characteristics (56+), that had planted at least one new church.

Those 4 groups were then compared with each other by the following criteria:

1. Attendance at church 5 years ago
2. Attendance at church today

3. Growth potential per 25 attendees over the last 5 years (eg. how many new attendees had the church gained per 25 attendees in the last 5 years?)



Growth also happens when members transfer

First of all, the data establishes that churches that plant daughter churches generally grow faster than those that do not. Even if the mother church initially loses members to the newly planted church, the growth of the daughter church is so strong that it compensates for the loss and can even surpass it. While barren churches gained only 5 new church attendees per 25 previous attendees in the past 5 years, mother churches gained 9 new attendees per 25 previous attendees.

Quality compared with multiplication

Comparing those churches that have reproduced with those that have a high quality index (included in this latter category are both mother churches and barren churches), reveals that the growth potential of the qualitatively good churches is larger: 16 new attendees, instead of 9, were gained in the last 5 years per 25 original attendees. Naturally, the following question arises, what happens if one compares both factors and investigates churches that both reproduce and have a high quality index?

Multiplication and quality

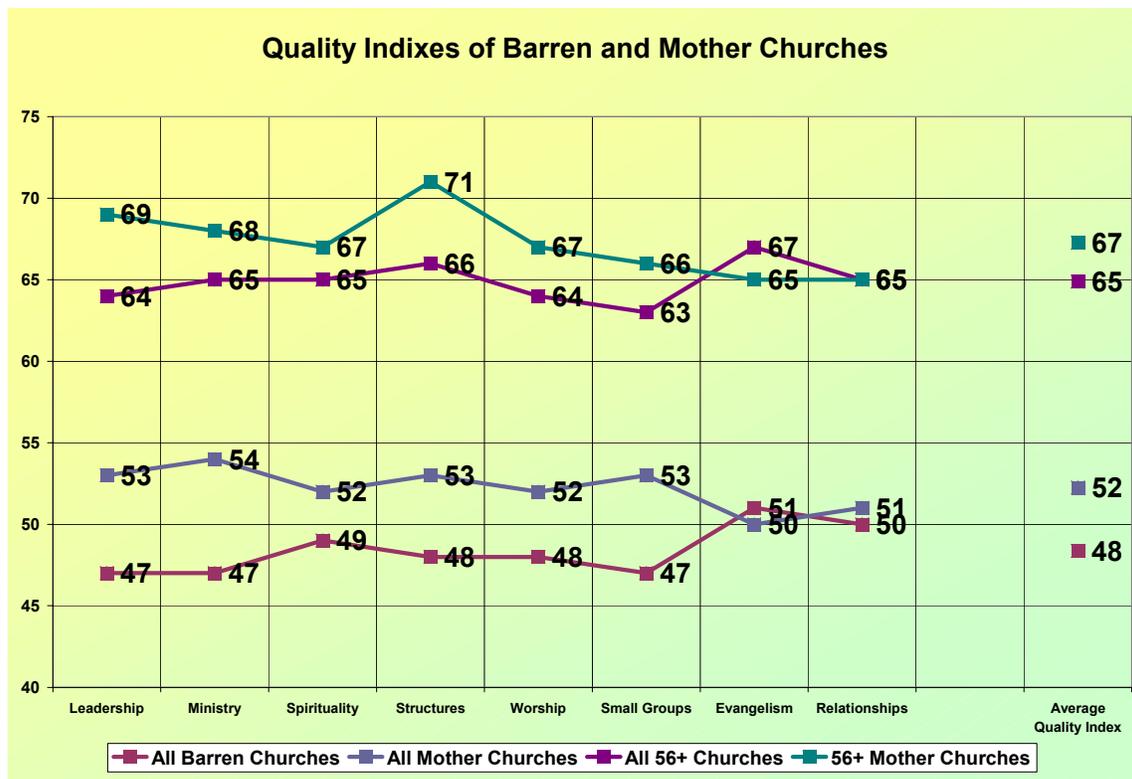
These results were not surprising. When superior quality is coupled with multiplication you generally find the greatest growth. In 5 years these very healthy mother churches added 18 new attenders for every 25 they had before.

Church quality and church multiplication together obviously make a valuable contribution to the growth of the church. The initial research carried out by the International Institute for Natural Church Development demonstrated the connection between growth and quality. Now we begin to see another dimension. When the multiplication variable comes into play we can truly have ‘more and better churches’ – which is really what we need in order to see the exponential growth of healthy churches.

When the quality rises

Our presentation so far has been concerned with the differences in growth potential; but it also pays to look at the different quality levels in the subgroups. We discovered that quality increased as we worked our way through the four groups:

1. The lowest quality level was found among the churches that have not multiplied.
2. Next were the churches that had planted daughter churches.
3. A further jump in quality took place when we considered only the 56+ churches.
4. Finally, when we selected the mother churches in the 56+ group we found the churches with the highest quality index.



Practical Conclusions

What practical relevance do these figures have? What can a local church do with this information?

(1) Generally, reproduction is mother-church friendly. As we have seen, churches that start daughter churches tend to experience two very positive side effects. First, they enjoy greater levels of health. Second, they experience faster growth rates. Therefore, worries that church planting will lead to a weakening of the mother church are unfounded, in most cases, if quality is worked on.

In all fairness, we should state clearly that church multiplication is not a panacea for all churches at all times. While not represented in the graphics we have included here, our data revealed that among low quality churches (50-), churches that started daughter churches were not necessarily better off in either the health or the growth aspect.

We must also mention the size factor. As can be seen in the graphics, it was the larger churches that were more likely to start daughter churches. This simply points to the fact that a church must have sufficient members before it can afford to give them away. Please note, though, that even the “larger” churches in this study are not really that large. This ought to encourage us not to put off the planting of a daughter church forever.

(2) Reproduction is Great-Commission friendly. Our research lends one more bit of evidence to the assertion made many years ago by C. Peter Wagner that church planting is one of the most effective evangelization methods available to the church. While we’ve looked at the increased growth rates of mother churches in this article, we’ve scarcely touched on what is happening with the daughter churches!

There are numerous indications that the growth rates of daughter churches are even better. For example, in our data on Spain, the unparalleled, stand-out characteristic for church plants is the quality characteristic “Need-oriented evangelism”. Furthermore, other research has shown that the growth rate of new churches far outstrips that of older, more settled churches.

Church multiplication is, by and large, a win-win-win proposition. The mother church wins. The daughter church wins. The gospel-needy world wins.

Jon Haley is the Spanish Partner of the Institute for Natural Church Development. For another perspective on the church multiplication issue, Jon has written an article titled, “Toward a Biblical Theology of Church Multiplication. It can be downloaded at www.bioiglesia.org/download/biostudy1.pdf

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