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Book Review: Cure for the Common Church: God's Plan to Restore Church Health by Bob Whitesel

Joshua L. Henry
Church Doctor Ministries

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Bob Whitesel, *Cure for the Common Church: God's Plan to Restore Church Health*. Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012, pp. 175. \$9.99.

Reviewed by Joshua L. Henry. Joshua is an Associate Church Consultant with Church Doctor Ministries and is the Consultation Coordinator for Healthy Churches Thrive! Joshua is also a trained Missional Leadership Coach and has an M.A. in Ministerial Leadership from Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University.

Bob Whitesel is an excellent teacher, communicator, and servant of the body. In his new book *Cure for the Common Church: God's Plan to Restore Church Health* (2012), Whitesel draws from his twenty-plus years of experience as a church consultant as well as his extensive research as a seminarian and professor. His wisdom from coaching ministry leaders shows as Whitesel so precisely articulates the four “cures” for a stagnated, struggling, or spiritually ill church.

This book, which states Whitesel's prescriptions and God's plan, is completely biblical and absolutely practical. The four cures that a church needs to grow are O.U.T., S.M.A.L.L., L.E.A.R.N.ers, and N.E.W. Each section begins with a chapter focusing on the “why” aspect, approaching the strategy from a theological and ecclesiological perspective. It is then followed by a chapter on the “how,” which

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 4, Iss. 2 [2013], Art. 10 offers practical implementation steps for each cure. Instead of advocating ministry fads and attractional events, Whitesel focuses on the scriptural principles of doing missional evangelism and service, nurturing relationships, creating a culture of discipleship, and emphasizing spiritual formation for restoring church health.

Whitesel explains that the cure to grow O.U.T. is an acronym that stands for:

O: Observe whom you are equipped to reach.

U: Understand the needs of those you are equipped to reach.

T: Tackle needs by refocusing, creating, or ending ministry programs” (p. 29).

In the same fashion, the cure to grow S.M.A.L.L spells:

S: Survey your small groups.

M: Missionalize all small groups.

A: Add more small groups.

L: Lead small groups.

L: Locate your focus in small groups.” (p. 72).

Whitesel teaches that a church can grow in L.E.A.R.N.ers by:

L: Linking learners publicly with a community of learners.

E: Every small group becomes a learning group.

A: Agreement emerges from learning.

R: Reproductive learners produce more learners.

N: Needs are met through learning-based action” (p. 103).

I feel the section on growing L.E.A.R.N.ers is of particular importance for the church in the West right now. With the growing awareness of a postmodern culture and the seismic societal shifts to secularization, Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples is returning as the church’s foremost biblical priority.

Finally, the cure to grow N.E.W. stands for:

N: Nonjudgmental atmosphere.

E: Explore the newness people crave.

W: Walk the bridge to newness with them” (p. 139).

Whitesel even gives instruction on how to formulate a T.E.A.M. approach to administer the cures to the body from the beginning and concludes his book with an advisory 90-Minute Annual Checkup. The T.E.A.M designates a group of congregants who will:

T: Find appropriate Treatments.

E: Educate the church about the best treatment.

A: Make an Action plan, and

M: Decide how to Measure progress” (p. 14).

Along with historical church examples from John Wesley and insights from seminal church consultant Lyle Schaller are biblical accounts of these practices

Henry: Book Review: Cure for the Common Church: God's Plan to Restore C and brief pastoral narratives to illustrate every cure. These short stories will be particularly beneficial for pastors and church T.E.A.M.s in grasping each growth cure and contextualizing it to their congregation.

If the church is dealing with an impending malady, a read through the “Quick-Start Guide” will indicate which chapters to go to for immediate help and suggested cures for restoring health. Figure A, “Identifying Your Church Problems and Your Cures,” is an invaluable tool that can be referred to several times as the church continues to grow and change through the years. Issues charted include what to do when there has been a recently fired staff member as well as corrections for worship that is dated and not reaching younger generations.

In addition, Whitesel includes several graphics, tables, discussion questions, and summary points to aid the readers in their partnering with God to lead their church to growth. These additions are perhaps the greatest strength of the book, for they take the theological and ecclesiastical components and help build the muscle on the bones of the body.

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Cure for the Common Church captures the missional mindedness of Donald McGavran and the Church Growth Movement along with the practical implications for administering cures that can only come through the years of Whitesel's consulting experience. As someone who serves in a church consulting ministry, I particularly appreciated Whitesel's beginning caution that “a true cure will only be effective if it is driven by the church members . . . thus, the most effective way to get a church back on the road to long-term health is for these churchgoers to identify the problem and administer the cures themselves” (p. 11–12).

I highly recommend Whitesel's book and pray the Lord uses it to help inform and inspire those in the church to action. May the *Missio Dei* be fulfilled as we share the reconciling message of Jesus Christ with others and lead wayward people back into the holy relationship God is intent on having.

William R. Burrows, Mark R. Gornik, and Janice A. McLean, eds. *Understanding World Christianity: The Vision and Work of Andrew F. Walls*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011, ix + 294 pp., \$30.00.

Reviewed by Dwight P. Baker, Ph.D., Senior Associate Editor, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut.

If they are physically, intellectually, and spiritually alive, missionaries in the field undergo conversion—always with significant personal effect. Faith is