

# Principles of healthy churches transcend culture, Tyler pastor says

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TYLER—A healthy church focuses on the same principles, regardless whether it meets in East Texas or East Africa, David Dykes, pastor of [Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler](#), believes.



“The only way a church can grow bigger is to grow smaller” through small cell groups, insists David Dykes, pastor of Green Acres Church in Tyler. (BP Photo) This summer, he taught pastors in Uganda and Tanzania the principles found in the [Healthy Church](#) materials he wrote.

Dykes taught at his first African pastors’ conference in 2012.

“They had never before tried a conference just for pastors. That was very successful. We probably had about 400 pastors. One of my associates went back last year, and they had about 1,000,” he said.

This year, Dykes participated in two conferences in Uganda and one in Tanzania attended by a total of about 1,800 pastors.

“At every place, it was packed. As many as could get in there were allowed to come,” Dykes said.

He has written a curriculum called *What Healthy Churches Do*, with two companion tracks, *What Healthy Pastors Do* and *How Healthy Disciples Live*.

### **Church 101**

“I basically wrote this curriculum for churches around the world, because it is nondenominational, noncultural—very transferable, very simple. I call it ‘Church 101,’” Dykes said.

“The pastors in Uganda and other countries where we go and teach this, they are very, very passionate, but they just don’t have much training. They are hungry for any kind of training. We’ve seemed to find a real point of need in training these pastors.”

Green Acres will hold 12 Global Healthy Church conferences this year. Dykes probably will attend only three personally, but a teaching team is in place to conduct training in the other venues. Sites include the Philippines, Colombia, Argentina, Cuba, Uganda, Tanzania, Pakistan and Mongolia.

“I wrote this material about five years ago for the house churches in China, so it’s been translated into Mandarin for the house-church group leaders to train their leaders,” he said.

### **Based on Acts 2:42-47**

Regardless of the setting, the training is appropriate because it is based on God’s word, Dykes said. *What Healthy Churches Do* is based on Acts 2:42-47, a description of life in the early church.

“There are 10 spiritual characteristics in there that really apply to every congregation, regardless of culture, location or language. So, I’m just trying to tell them that everybody wants to grow their church, but we can’t do that—only God can grow his church. But when we create a healthy atmosphere, that’s when God can grow his church,” Dykes said.

The training emphasizes the necessity of small groups.

“In Acts 2, it says they met daily in temple courts in a large group, but then they went into homes where they broke bread. A key to a healthy church is to have small groups, as well as the big worship experience. For these churches in Africa, they all have a large-group worship experience, and they may vary in size from 50 people to 1,000 or 2,000 in worship. They just haven’t learned what it is to have these small cell groups, and that is a healthy thing for a church,” Dykes said. “The only way a church can grow bigger is to grow smaller.”

### **Importance of stewardship**

The curriculum also deals with the importance of stewardship—not only personal stewardship, but also how churches should handle contributions.

“In many churches in Africa, they will have a little basket down front on the floor, and during the worship service, people will dance forward and put in their offering. When that song is over, the pastor will come and take all that money and put it in his pocket. It creates the image to the people who attend that the pastor is getting all the money,” Dykes explained.

“He’s probably very honorable and is going to use the money in a wise way, in most cases. But we try to teach them things as simple as it’s not wise for only one person to handle the money. Everything should be done with honesty, integrity and transparency when it comes to money in a church.”

### **Expository preaching**

The pastors' conferences also teach the importance of expository preaching—verse-by-verse explanation of the biblical text based on serious study and preparation, Dykes noted.

“For many of them, it is still a spontaneous thing. They may have thought a little about a verse, but then they just stand up and kind of wing it. That’s one of the things that I’ve heard back from them that has really improved their Bible teaching and preaching—to teach God’s word line by line, precept upon precept,” he said.

Every church should aspire to be healthy, Dykes insisted.

“When churches look at what these 10 characteristics are, it becomes very clear how many they have in their church without even having to do any kind of diagnostic study. We thought about putting something like that together but decided it would be a waste of time. We want to talk more about the cure than the cause,” Dykes said.