



**ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
BOARD OF GENERAL SUPERINTENDENTS
TO THE
92ND GENERAL BOARD
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE**

22 February 2015

**“Celebrating God’s Grace—
Anticipating God’s Renewal”**

INTRODUCTION

Praise the LORD, all you nations;
extol him, all you peoples.
For great is his love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.
Praise the LORD.
(Psalm 117, NIV)

On behalf of the Board of General Superintendents (BGS) and with the psalmist's exhortation of "praise," I greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is an honor to represent my colleagues in presenting our annual report to the 92nd General Board Session of the Church of the Nazarene.

We welcome each one to this plenary meeting and thank you for representing your respective region and the 2.3 million Nazarenes of our international holiness communion. Many General Board members have come great distances, and we are grateful for traveling mercies.

There is much to know about a General Board Session. What is most important?

First, it is our desire to personally and corporately experience the presence of God through the Holy Spirit in our times together. The Church of the Nazarene is a church of the Holy Spirit and prayer.

We must be under the leadership of God's blessed Spirit in who we are, what we say, and what we do. The Holy Spirit not only guides us, but He also checks us in our role as spiritual leaders. It is through prayer and God's Word that we stay attuned to that "still small voice."

Second, by God's grace, we are able to report on and be accountable for the church's ministry in the past year. Our report is really that of the entire church, and while our focus is broad and general, we do not lose sight of the fact that this report is the aggregate of the mission of God. It is being expressed and carried forward by every Nazarene in every local church in 159 world areas.

Many years ago the songwriter penned, “He has done great things,” and the Bible says, “But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you” (1 Samuel 12:24, NIV).

There is no question that the Lord is doing great things through the Church of the Nazarene.

Third, from their unique perspective, it is the responsibility of the general superintendents to offer an assessment of the fulfillment of the church’s mission around the world. While this is not the only perspective, it is one that is specifically assigned to the BGS for ecclesiastical supervision of the denomination (*Manual* paragraph 306).

As General Superintendent David Busic reminded us in last year’s report, God works in a “season,” which He has made (Daniel 2:21). It is up to us to know the times and seasons in order that our programs, plans, and methods are up to date with His will and way.

May He be glorified in what we have to report and celebrate about His church.

Appreciation

How much work does it take to organize a General Board Session?

It takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of teamwork.

Our appreciation goes to General Secretary David Wilson and his staff, who make sure everyone is well cared for in the meetings and accommodations. Thank you, Dr. Wilson, Susan Metcalf, Diane Miller, Shirley Marvin, and others—including the translators—who labor faithfully on our behalf to organize this event.

Thanks also to Renée Rotz and the BGS office staff, who work closely with the general superintendents to prepare for each General Board Session, and to the Global Ministry Center staff for their expertise in organizing the committees and gathering extensive documentation for this time of accountability.

THE NAZARENE LEGACY— GOD’S PURPOSE FOR THE NAZARENE FAMILY

What is a legacy?

For those of us engaged in ministry to and with people, a legacy is “something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past” (Merriam-Webster).

If this is an accurate definition, what is the Nazarene legacy, and how should it be celebrated?

With generational transition sweeping the Church of the Nazarene, it is important to remember a legacy of faith and a life of holiness left by those who went before us—and be willing to share that faith and holy lifestyle with those who become part of the Nazarene family.

Deuteronomy 6:5–7 (MEV) says:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I command you today, shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.

We are standing on the shoulders of pastors, teachers, evangelists, missionaries, and lay leaders who are part of the “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 11), those who preceded us and who faithfully laid the foundation for the Church of the Nazarene that we celebrate today.

Similarly, as disciples of Christ, called to be His people for our generation, we need to constantly ask ourselves the question, “What will our spiritual legacy be?”

- When our children ask fathers in times to come, “What do these stones mean?” will we be able to let them know that at just the right time God parted the waters so the Church of the Nazarene could pass over on dry ground? (Joshua 4:22)
- Will we be able to tell them that our church was ready and preached the word “in season and out of season”? (2 Timothy 4:1–22)
- Like Paul, will they write about us that we fought a good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith? (2 Timothy 4:6–8)

What should we celebrate at the 92nd General Board Session?

We celebrate the local church.

There is no general or district mission without the local mission. In a General Board setting, it is easy to look past our pastors and congregations and focus only on general ministries; however, the local church is the reason we are here and can be here.

Local churches make it possible to have a General Board, General Assembly, and Global Ministry Center. They make it possible to have a district and a district superintendent. They make it possible to have missionaries and national leaders.

Today we celebrate the local church, “the representation of our faith and mission” (*Manual*, Part IV, Preamble).

We celebrate 100 years of Nazarene Missions International (NMI).

Nazarene Missions International will be 100 years old in October 2015. As the heart of the missionary intention of the Church of the Nazarene, NMI has always been at the forefront of the church—inspiring, educating, praying, and supporting the missionary enterprise of our denomination. This centennial celebration is no exception.

In May of 2014, NMI announced more than 1,400 initiatives for its 100th Anniversary Project.

Last fall leaders from throughout the denomination—JESUS Film Harvest Partners, Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, the Church of the Nazarene's International Board of Education, and districts, fields, and regions—envisioned a series of initiatives they would like to see accomplished in their areas.

A wide variety of ideas were submitted and processed by the NMI team. Each district was encouraged to meet the needs of another district by adopting one of the initiatives listed and providing funds to complete the sponsored project by October 2015.

While the support of these initiatives is exciting and meaningful, the ongoing engagement of NMI is truly evident in the way in which it promotes the missionary sending efforts of our Global Mission Office. Last year alone the Church of the Nazarene sent and supported 702 missionaries (global, regional, and volunteer) to accompany the local church in fulfilling our mission, “To Make Christlike Disciples in the Nations.”

We celebrate NMI, the “heart and voice” of Nazarene missions.

We celebrate caring Nazarenes.

We live in a world that is constantly impacted by human and natural calamities. While others act as mere spectators of the daily news, the Church of the Nazarene, a compassionate church, is always there to be the hands and feet of Jesus to those in need and in despair. The recent outbreak of the Ebola virus is one such example.

The Ebola epidemic, entering its tenth month, has left a devastating impact on local families and communities in West Africa. It has taken the lives of Nazarenes who were our brothers and sisters in Christ, including Joe Sonkpah, pastor of the Grace Chapel Church of the Nazarene in Liberia. He passed away 10 October 2014, just days after his wife, Hannah, perished from the same disease.

We mourn the loss of each life.

The World Health Organization estimates that more than 8,000 people have died, and more than 21,000 people have been infected with the disease.

The Church of the Nazarene continues to respond with compassionate care and service. Through Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, led by Larry Bollinger and a committed staff that partners with local congregations, we are providing education programs, prevention and hygiene supplies, food, and vitamins.

We celebrate the Christlike love Nazarenes continually display bringing hope to those facing devastation and loss.

We celebrate 70 years of Nazarene Theological Seminary (NTS).

Education Secretary H. Orton Wiley urged the church to plan for the establishment of a central theological seminary of graduate rank.¹ Nazarene Theological Seminary was authorized at the 1944 General Assembly in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. The location would be in Kansas City, Missouri, USA. The new institution opened its doors in September 1945.

There were at least two additional champions of NTS: General Superintendent J. B. Chapman and Nazarene Young People's Society (NYPS).

The first president of NTS was Hugh C. Benner, with financial support in the beginning days from Nazarene Publishing House.

NTS has graduated nearly 6,000 students in seven decades. It continues to serve the church and the broader Wesleyan community through an expanded global presence and partnerships, which include other Nazarene schools.

Under the leadership of the current president, Carla Sunberg, the NTS Board of Trustees recently voted to remain in Kansas City, a decision that is consistent with the purpose of the school to prepare leaders for their generation.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW—GOD’S GRACE AT WORK

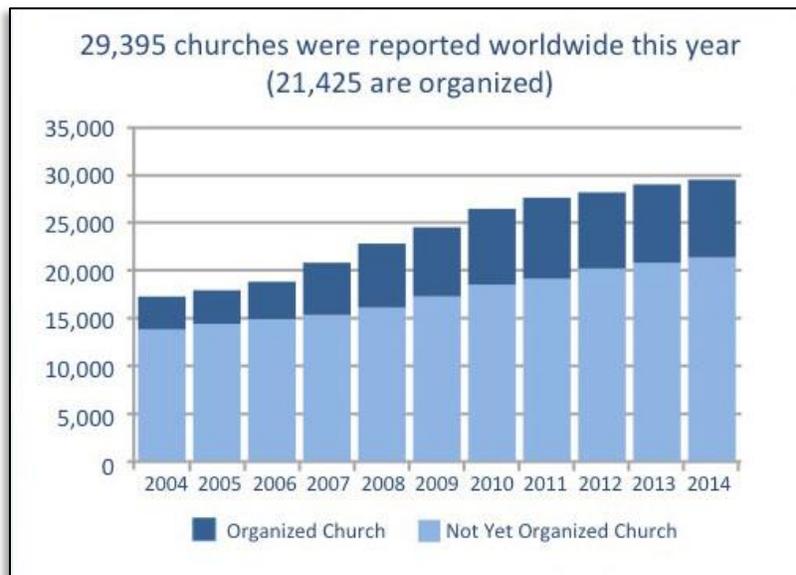
We celebrate the fruits of ministry.

From its earliest days, the denomination has been characterized by a cooperative system of reporting that tracks the church’s progress. While statistical accounting is not the sole measure of fruitfulness, it is one way to monitor our ministry and alert us to any issues that may need attention by leadership.

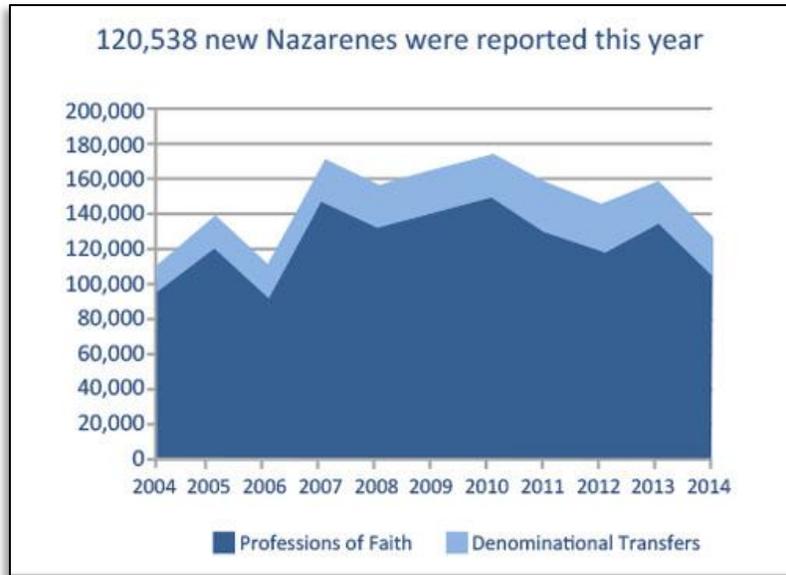
Every number has a name—the name of a daughter, a son, a spouse, a parent, a relative, or a co-worker who has been reached by the holiness message and the caring mission of the Church of the Nazarene. As the church continues to grow, the most important number remains “one.” Behind each “one” there is “one” of these important people. Therefore we track numbers, report them, and celebrate them.

In 2014, the General Secretary’s Office reported:

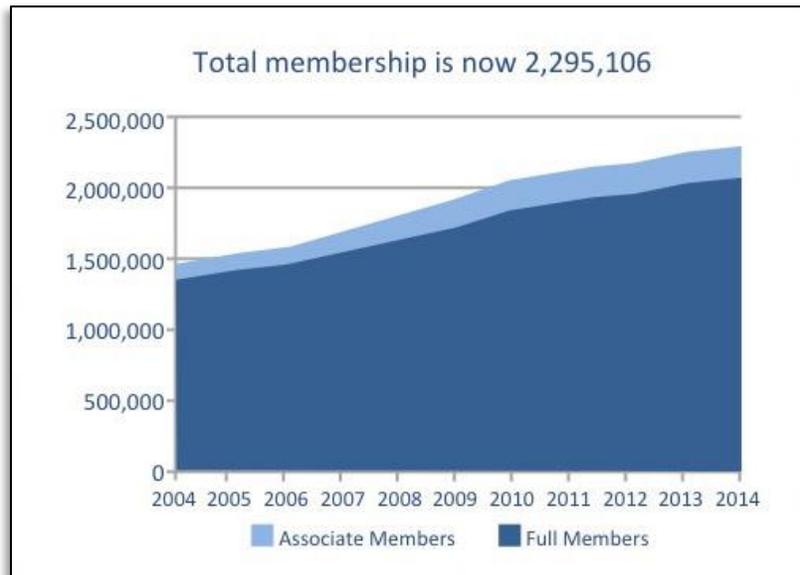
- Churches worldwide—29,395 with 21,425 organized
(In 2013—29,007 with 20,816 organized)



- New Nazarenes—120,538
(In 2013—156,441)

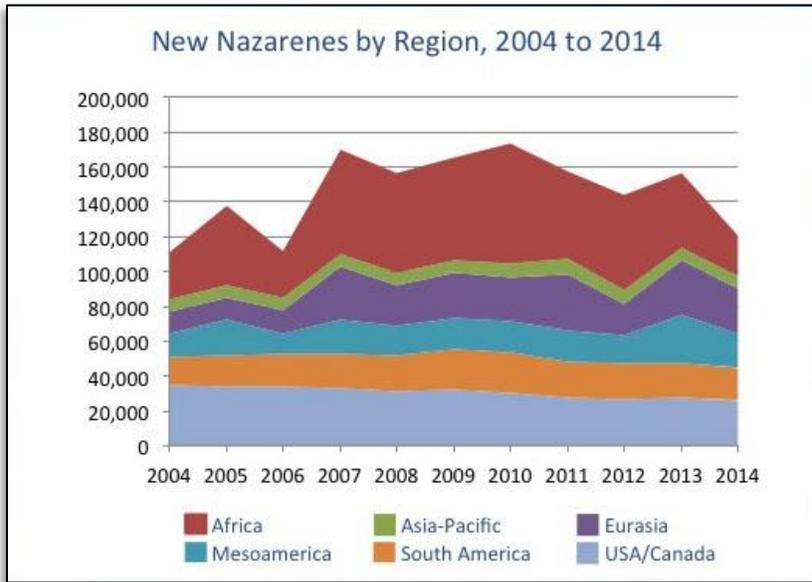


- Total membership—2,295,106
(In 2013—2,263,249)

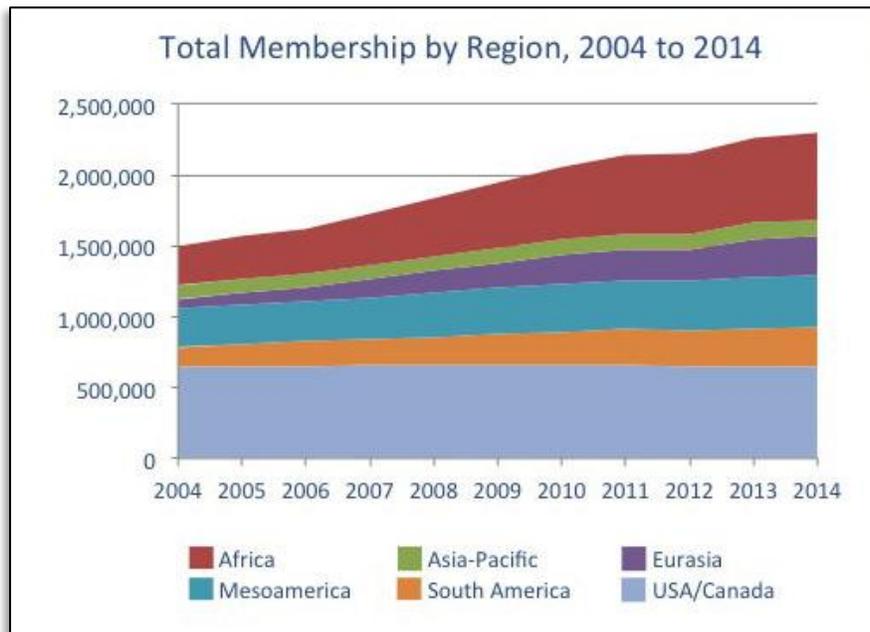


For another perspective, four categories show decadal trend lines by region. These graphs give a quick glance at the trends and patterns of growth in the denomination for the last ten years:

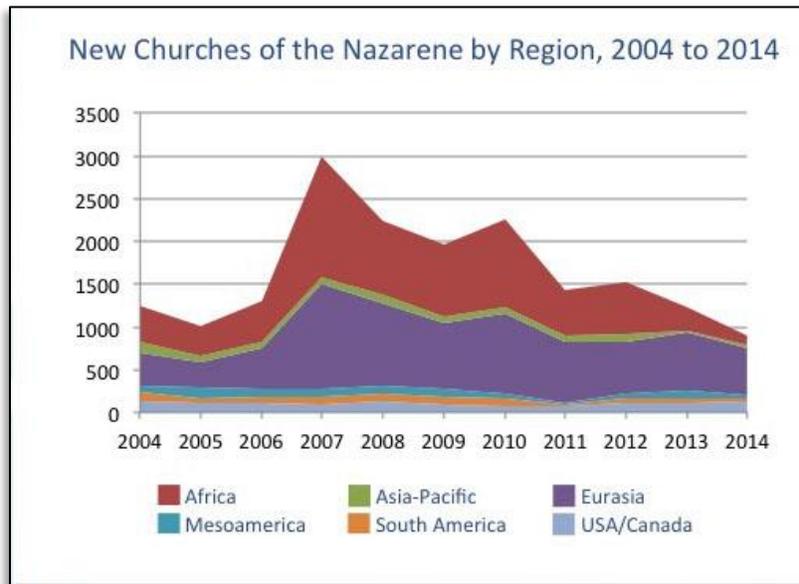
- New Nazarenes



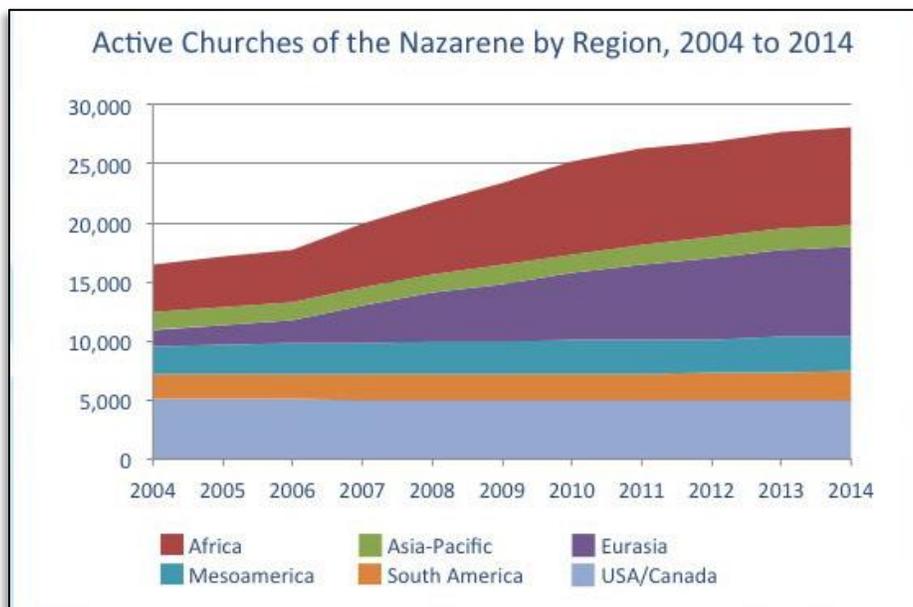
- Total Membership



- New Churches



- Active Churches



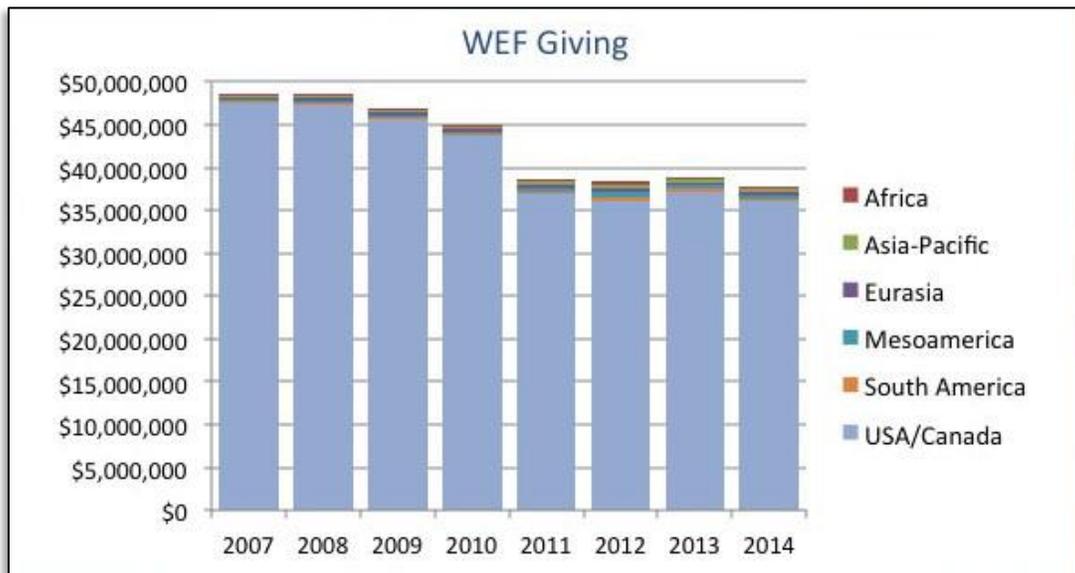
It is important to note that some trends appear to be down because more than one-third of the Africa districts did not update their figures from 2013. This automatically eliminates any new Nazarenes or new churches from the reports of those districts; likewise, membership and attendance changes are not shown for those districts. This is obvious when regional comparisons are made.

Funding the Mission

In 2014, the total World Evangelism Fund given globally by local Churches of the Nazarene was \$37.9 million (US), down \$1.0 million from 2013.

The nearly \$38 million for WEF last year is essentially the same amount reported in 1999.

In 2014, \$35.3 million was given to Approved Mission Specials. That brings the total 2014 reported for WEF and Approved Mission Specials to \$73.2 million in support of the church's global mission.²



While reported giving has remained at consistent levels for the past four years, it has not recovered from the economic recession of 2007–2009. That serious financial downturn, a change in the budget system implemented in 2011, and the general church asking for less during the past 30 years contribute to keeping WEF below its historic high of \$48.6 million (US) in 2007.

The Board of General Superintendents expresses gratitude to Nazarenes everywhere for your dedication to God and your generosity in funding the mission of making Christlike disciples in the nations. By praying, going, and giving you honor God and reach a lost and dying world with the much-needed message of holiness.

UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives.
All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take.
1 Chronicles 12:32 (NLT)

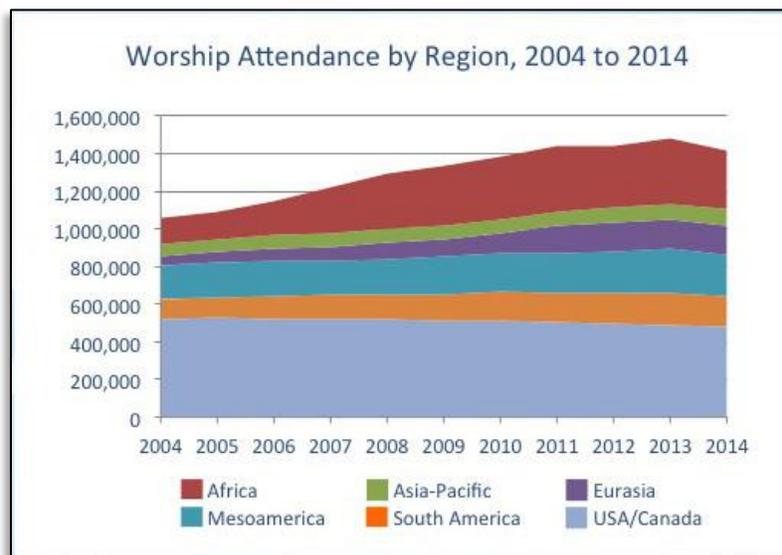
In his book, *Leadership is an Art*, Max De Pree states, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality, the last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant.” With that important task in mind, the first thing we need to do is understand the reality of the Church of the Nazarene as we near the first decade of our second century.

Last year’s statistics tell us that the Church of the Nazarene continues to grow and move forward. In 2014, the denomination experienced yet another year of positive gains in full membership. Nazarene churches around the world gained 41,736 members (2.04 percent over the previous year). In the last ten years, the denomination has grown in total membership by nearly 800,000, which represent a 53.4 percent decadal growth.

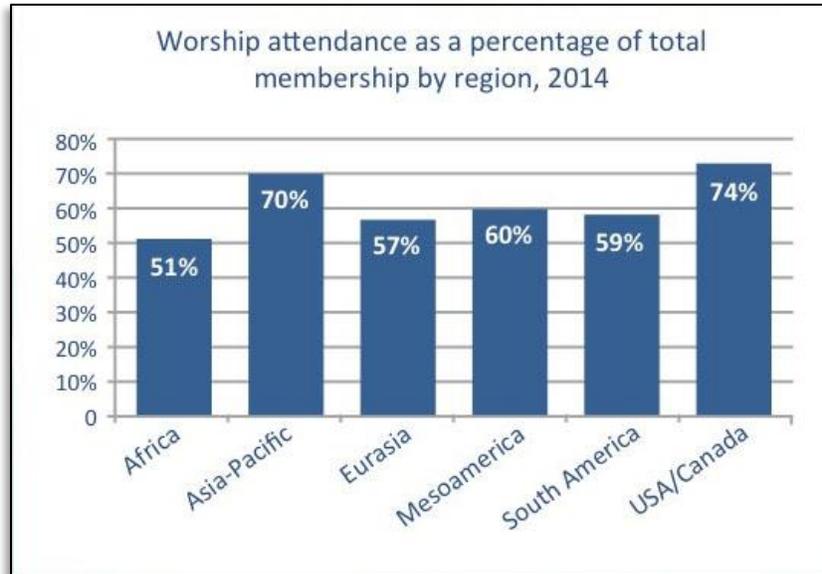
Last year, however, we experienced the smallest full-membership growth percentage for the denomination in many years. This may be the result of various factors, but when these numbers are compared to other statistical indicators, it reveals a slowing of the denomination’s trend toward consistent growth.

This can be better understood by looking at three factors: average weekly attendance, newly organized churches, and the global commitment to funding the mission.

Average Weekly Attendance: At 1,417,397 in 2014, the average weekly worship represents only 62 percent of the total membership of the denomination, a decline of 4.2 percent from the previous year.

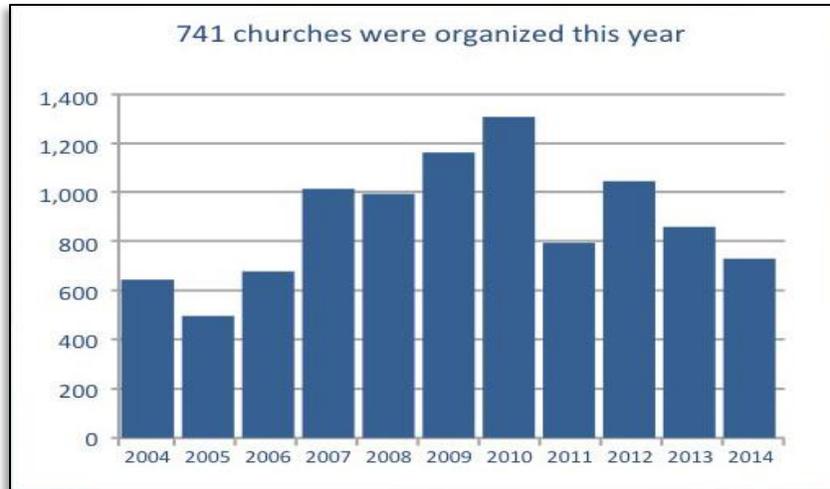


While full membership has steadily climbed, weekly attendance is declining at a sharper pace than the rate of membership growth. This is significant because weekly attendance is a strong indicator of sustained loyalty to the endeavors of the local church, the focal point of our denomination.



In a healthy denomination, the numbers of those attending churches would be larger than the numbers of those who have become full members. In the Church of the Nazarene, this does not seem to be the case in recent years, and we need to find mechanisms to close the gap.

Church Planting and Church Organization: The denomination again shows a net gain in organized churches. We have increased by 609 congregations; however, 506 of them (or 83 percent) were in one region alone—Eurasia. The other five regions together had a net gain of 103 organized churches. Furthermore, one country alone—Bangladesh—was responsible for 56 percent of the net gain in organized churches for the entire denomination (340).



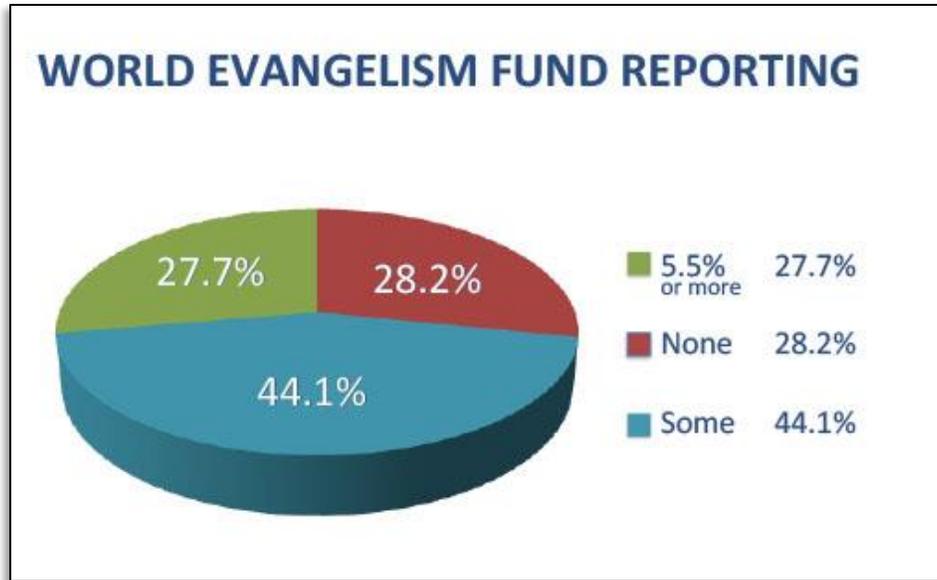
This means that the net gain of 269 organized churches outside of three districts in Bangladesh was shared by 462 districts. In other words, last year it took an average of 1.7 districts to facilitate the net gain of one organized church.

Funding the Mission: We are grateful for the multiple ways in which God has blessed and prospered the Nazarene family. In spite of the financial crises and economic turmoil, the overall income of the denomination increased by 6.5 percent during the last ten years, and the generous spirit of Nazarenes is evident in that the missional disbursements have increased by 9.6 percent since 2004.

However, while Nazarenes continue to give sacrificially, it appears that giving to fund the mission has reached a plateau, and it has neither kept up with the cost of living nor with the overall membership growth.

On a positive note, the participation rate in the global World Evangelism Fund (WEF) has increased from 59.1 percent to 71.8 percent during the five years since the global WEF goal of 5.5 percent was adopted by the General Board.

Nonetheless, as the financial reports show, only 27.7 percent of congregations (most of which are located in the USA/Canada Region) contributed at least 5.5 percent of their income to the World Evangelism Fund, while 28.2 percent did not report a single contribution to the WEF and 44.1 percent have reported some level of giving less than 5.5 percent.³



While a majority of church planting can be ascribed to one country in one region (Bangladesh, Eurasia Region), the same can be said about giving. One region alone (USA/Canada) has contributed the vast majority of resources to fund the mission (95 percent) and one country alone (the United States) was responsible for 92.5 percent of the total funding of the mission.

We are thankful to God for the fact that districts in regions outside of the USA/Canada Region are increasingly giving to the cause of funding the mission. And we do understand that the economies of scale and the sheer size of the membership in other regions make the comparisons difficult.

The Need for Reflection

These current trends by no means minimize the incredible story of the many blessings God has bestowed on our denomination. The statistics and stories highlight how God has blessed through its first century of ministry, and He continues to bless the Nazarene family as we spread the message of heart holiness. We need to celebrate!

These numbers and trends also highlight the importance of faithful reflection and revision of our reality so that we can celebrate joyfully, reflect prayerfully, and respond obediently. By doing so, we will be able to understand the times and prayerfully respond to the future. This has been the common thread throughout the history of the Church of the Nazarene. Our history has been marked by periods in which Nazarenes have displayed obedience and implemented Spirit-filled responses to the generational demands of their times without changing the message, the mission, and the doctrine.

WOULD THIS BE ONE OF THESE TIMES?

Statistics are just one of the ways to define reality. Examining the state of our institutions is yet another way. During the last two decades, several of our structures and institutions have been subject to careful examination and re-envisioning.

In the last quarter of a century, we have put together committees and commissions to help determine the relevance, effectiveness, and future of various entities that have been the flagships of the denomination during its first full century of life.

Some of these institutions have been subjected to major reviews and repairs. Some are beyond repair, and our present generation is watching closely, awaiting our response to their requests for review and revisioning.

Some examples include:

Nazarene Publishing House (NPH): After 102 years of successful ministry, the business model of Nazarene Publishing House was deemed obsolete. Changes in the publishing industry and in ministry models at the local level demanded a full review of the business model at NPH. After a series of changes and reorganizational attempts, the old business model ended on 1 December 2014. NPH began a new day on 2 December.

Our publishing house is now in a major process of reinvention, renewal, and relaunch that will be responsive to the needs of the church today without losing touch with the local congregations that have made NPH the largest and most influential Wesleyan publisher in the United States and beyond.

Nazarene Missions International (NMI): As mentioned previously, our flagship missions organization, one of the best-known entities of mission, not only among Nazarenes but also among other evangelicals, is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2015.

From the General Missionary Committee established in 1915 to Women's Missionary Society constituted in 1923, and from a Nazarene Foreign Missionary Society (1952), which included men in their charter, to a Nazarene World Mission Society (1964), Nazarene Missions International (as renamed in 2001) is one of the symbols of an adaptive organization within the Nazarene denomination.

Today, the NMI Global Council continues to work with the Board of General Superintendents to determine the role of NMI in engaging with the missionary endeavors of the denomination. As recently as February of this year, global, regional, and district NMI leaders gathered in Kansas City to reflect, review, and envision the future of NMI so it can continue to be the relevant and missional entity the denomination needs.

Global Ministry Center: As part of the Revisioning of the Church of the Nazarene for the 21st Century Project launched in 2008, the Global Ministry Center (GMC) has been involved in a major ongoing, restructuring venture. This, however, has not been the only restructuring that this center for ministry support and services has undergone.

In fact, the International Church of the Nazarene Headquarters, formerly at 6401 The Paseo, Kansas City, Missouri, USA, was restructured in 1981 and again in the early 1990s; the GMC, most recently in 2011. The concept of a global ministry center and its purpose continues to be revisited in light of the needs of the global church and its various expressions.

Nazarene Youth International (NYI): Like our missions agency, Nazarene Youth International has also been under constant review and adaptation. In the last quadrennium alone, NYI underwent a major review of its practice, programs, and structure with the purpose of adapting to the realities of our time and ensuring a vibrant, missional church for the future. Setting the pace for the denomination, NYI engaged in this process, which included a close look at its history.

In a meeting of global mission leaders in 2011, Global NYI Director Gary Hartke summarized their conclusions:

Between 1895 and 1923, the NYPS was all about the **message**. It was a **movement**. Between 1923 and 1946, the focus of NYPS was the **mission**. The emphasis was so successful that the focus of NYPS between 1946 and 1976 was the **machinery**, the way to become organized and programmatic. From 1976 to the present day, NYI has focused primarily on the institution, the **monument**. It is time for us to return to the message and *the mission*.

Two things seem to be apparent as we prayerfully review our current reality: 1) this generation is facing an important juncture in the life of our denomination, and 2) this is not the first time the church has been asked to adapt to the current world realities.

In its first century of ministry, God blessed the Nazarene family with leadership and insight that helped the church transition through various generations with boldness, humility, and prayerful direction. In their historical account of the denomination, *Our Watchword and Song*, Floyd Cunningham and others suggested the generational stages and their priorities during our first 100 years, from being the inclusive church of our founders to becoming the global church of our generation. The authors emphasized that each generation has been at a crossroads (one way or the other), and they have navigated their times with the help of God and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, they posed a question for our generation: how will we face another transition into the future?

As the sons of Issachar, we understand that we are facing another crossroads. After one century of ministry, it has become apparent that some of the models, entities, and programs that helped the denomination thrive and expand are experiencing the effects of age, and they have, for the

last 25 years, been subject to evaluation, review, and even repair. But this is the time to move forward.

While we celebrate the legacy and the life experienced by years of missional and doctrinal zeal, there is a sense of expectation for RENEWAL in our denomination.

Why is renewal important?

History tells us that renewal is not always the “path of least resistance.” Social and religious organisms are, for the most part, more comfortable with incremental repairs as they adjust to the needs and realities of the day. We do that with buildings, with automobiles, with clothing. We repair these tools of our livelihood either because we cannot afford to renew them or simply because we have grown accustomed to them. When speaking to His disciples, Jesus was fully aware of this human tendency, and yet, He warned them about the risks of “constant repair” while expecting “revival.”

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins (Mark 2:21–22, NIV).

THE FUTURE: RENEWAL

Defining reality does not mean that we have a bleak future. On the contrary, God continues to give the Nazarene family the opportunity of joining Him to reach our generation as He moves with might and grace. He is in the business of spiritually renewing His people.

He promises to renew our strength, to renew our minds, to renew our blessing. He offers to do something new! Renewal has always been part of God’s plan for His people.

See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.
Isaiah 43:19 (NIV)

Understanding the times is just one part of our response. The second is to prayerfully seek what we should do. In desiring God’s promise of renewal, the church needs to understand the requirements for renewal. We recognize that making incremental repairs and improvements may be the easier, less expensive way to respond to our realities; however, we also realize that these are only short-term responses. God demands a long-term view of the future, and we must embrace that future with prayer, boldness, and gratitude.

As we await the fulfillment of God's promise for renewal, there are three things the Church is called to do:

- a) Be willing to join the movement of God
- b) Be committed to strengthening the core, while reviewing and redesigning our methods and systems
- c) Have a Spirit-filled expectation for the future that God promises

JOINING THE MOVEMENT OF GOD

God is at work in many places in the world. He always has been. He always will be. God has released His prevenient grace in world areas, countries, states, and neighborhoods with the purpose of redeeming His people. This prevenient grace of God at work has started multiple focal points where His presence and His plans are evident, and yet, not everyone joins His movement.

It is imperative for the church to be sensitive to the moving of the Spirit of God in our midst so that we can, as Nazarenes in the Mid-Atlantic District of the United States determined, "Move with God Now!"

God creates the movements, and all His movements are original works!

God's people join His movement. There have been numerous instances where the growth and development of the Church of the Nazarene occurred because we decided to join the movement of God.

Conversely, we have witnessed many places around the globe where other members of the Christian family have been able to harvest the results of God's movement because we have not been able to grasp and join the work of God in these locations.

A visit to the Island of Sao Miguel in the Azores could help illustrate this. The island is one of the nine islands of this archipelago that was formed through volcanic explosions. The geothermal steam is an evidence of this formation. At the center of the island lies the small and beautiful town of Furnas (Furnaces), a setting whose incredible beauty is only spoiled by the smell of sulfur that emanates from the various holes in the ground.

For centuries, volcanic energy has been finding ways to rise to the surface, and it does so by making small holes and creating non-violent emissions of steam. The local people have been able to maximize the energy and benefits of such an incredible resource. In addition to utilizing it for electric generation and cooking directly on the ground, the locals have made these "furnace places" very attractive for visitors to see and enjoy.



Given the popularity of the furnaces, locals have learned over the years to build a structure to “capture and maximize the thermal energy whenever and wherever it breaks out.” These structures serve a dual purpose—to manage and contain the steam and to provide an organized view of the site.



However, there are times when the steam breaks out in other places or it simply chooses to move to other spots on the ground, making these structures obsolete. “The energy has moved on while the locals are still decorating the empty structures. Only the flexible responses that adapted to the changes of geothermal energy continue maximizing its use.”

There is a lesson to learn from the Furnaces in the Azores, and it is this: renewal requires us to follow the moving of the Spirit while adapting models and structures. These are important, but the moving of God’s Spirit is essential.

We must be able to use and maximize our structures, models, and systems, but this is not as important as to humbly and obediently follow the moving of the Holy Spirit that breaks ground around us. As important and useful as our structures and models are, we cannot afford to let them limit and restrain the powerful movement of the Spirit of God. We cannot allow our methods, models, and structures to become obsolete while the presence of God is moving elsewhere.

God will do something new.

The history of the Church of the Nazarene is filled with stories of God's people who joined the movement of God. In our generation, we have seen the hand of God moving in unexpected places, and growth of the Church of the Nazarene has occurred because missional Nazarenes have joined the moving of God and became part of a holiness movement.

Bangladesh continues to be such a story. Thanks to the invitation of a Nazarene layman from Samoa, Franklin Cook and Steve Weber first visited the country and established the work there. The country was one of the poorest and least evangelized in the world. When I first visited Bangladesh there were only two congregations. Today, the Church of the Nazarene in Bangladesh reports nearly 80,000 members who worship in more than 2,800 organized churches, making the Church of the Nazarene the largest denomination in that country.

As the Eurasia regional director, I had the privilege of visiting Bangladesh again in 2005. They had grown to more than 300 organized churches, and we asked them, "How large is too large?" We understood that such a large district would represent many missiological and organizational challenges. We asked them about the optimal size to "structure for crisis prevention." Their answer was 1,000 churches!

They met as a team to envision the future with 1,000 organized churches, and they set 2015 as the target year. At the 2010 district assembly, with four general superintendents in attendance, the Church of the Nazarene in Bangladesh reported more than 1,200 organized churches, giving birth to three Phase 3 Districts, all with the same DNA of growth and multiplication.

Are the Nazarenes the only ones growing in Bangladesh? Of course not! God is moving in Bangladesh and other Christian groups are catching on. However, because Nazarenes joined the movement of God in that part of the world, the Church of the Nazarene is by far the largest and most influential Christian church in the nation.

Benin, in Africa, is also another example of how the Church of the Nazarene joined the movement of God. The work of the church started there in 1998 through a "glocal" partnership sponsored by what was then called World Mission and Nazarenes in Ivory Coast.

They sensed that God was at work in the corridor between Burkina Faso, Mali, Benin, and Togo, and they decided to join the movement of God. Today, there are more than 54,000 full members in more than 1,300 congregations in these four countries.

The story of the Church of the Nazarene in the Pendjari region of Benin illustrates the way in which Nazarenes join God's movement.

Moise, the national missionary from Benin (who had found Christ and His mission in Ivory Coast) had targeted the village with his missionary team, and they asked the village chief for the opportunity to establish a church in Benin. He reluctantly agreed with the understanding that the purpose would simply be to entertain the youth as "a way to prevent bad behaviors."

When the work of the church was established in the village, the chief's wife was severely ill with what the village healers called an "incurable disease." In desperation, the chief asked the missionary if he could pray for his wife for healing. God healed her, and the chief and his family turned to Christ!

When we visited Pendjari with Fili Chambo and Moise, the village chief wanted us to dedicate the mountain that he had donated to the Church of the Nazarene. He wanted this beautiful mountain to remain as a testimony of a God who heals, who saves, and who brings shalom to his community. Today the village has a Nazarene school (the first and only in miles), there is a vibrant church, and the village has become an epicenter of God's powerful presence.



And then there is Brazil.

Started in 1958 to honor the golden anniversary of the Church of the Nazarene, the work in Brazil is an example of an entire nation that joined the movement of God.

The movement of God had reached Brazil in the mid-1950s, and the Church of the Nazarene did not want to miss it. In late 1957, a young missionary couple was commissioned to start the work and establish contacts so that it could be made official in 1958. By 1961 and after just two years of ministry, the Nazarene holiness movement in Brazil had three organized churches and 20 preaching points with 110 members. God was at work in a nation that was thirsty for righteousness, and the Nazarenes did not want to miss His movement!

The early days of the work in Brazil are a great example of how Nazarenes join God's transforming power at work in the nations. While commissioned missionaries made contacts in the community, follow-up and discipleship was in the hands of volunteer lay people. Irvin and Marge Stegmoller, a lay couple from Indianapolis, Indiana, USA, joined the missionaries and taught Sunday School in their living room to young Brazilian believers. Among these young believers was Aguiar Valvassoura, who later became a prominent leader of the Church of the Nazarene and the evangelical community in Brazil. These faithful lay people illustrate the importance of every believer joining the movement of God.

For the last three decades God has been at work in Brazil. A 2014 Pew Research Center study predicted that the Catholic Church is expected to lose its majority status by 2030, while evangelicals are poised to become a transformational force in the country. Nazarenes continue to be part of such a transformation.

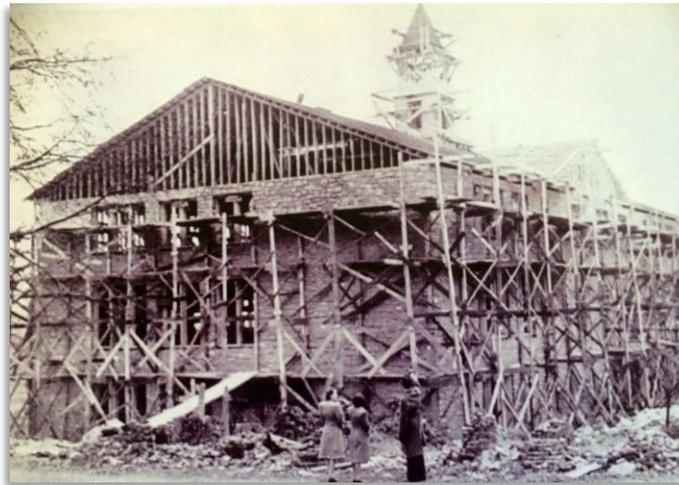
Today missionaries have turned the church into a vibrant, growing, and mature people where more than 145,000 members worship in 520 organized churches. The missionary vision and zeal of the Nazarenes (who in 1958 decided to join the movement of God in Brazil) are now reaping dividends in ways that the pioneer missionaries could not have imagined. They went. They shared. They served. Today, Brazilian Nazarenes with the same DNA of missional holiness are going, sharing, and serving. We welcome the five members of the General Board who are here to represent Brazil and the South America Region.

Renewal requires an unwavering commitment to join the movement of God.

STRENGTHENING THE CORE, RENOVATING THE METHODS

One of the common misconceptions in times of review is that "everything needs to be revisited and changed." This is an unwise and unnecessary approach. Renewal does not mean we demolish and level what exists in order to build something new from scratch. On the contrary, one of the main requirements of renewal is to build on what is essential and adapt to what is contextual. In other words, renewal demands that we keep our foundation and identity intact so we can adapt the non-essentials to the realities of our generation and our context.

The story of the McClurkan Building at Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA, helps illustrate this important renewal principle. The building reflects what Trevecca and Nazarenes are all about. Built between 1941 and 1942, it was intended to become the central piece of a campuswide development scheme using vernacular models. Symbolic of the Nazarene ethos of the time, it was built by students and faculty who demonstrated ownership of the cause, the project, and the denomination it represented.



Over time, the McClurkan building became the symbol and identity of the university and served its purpose well throughout various generations.

However, years of use and exposure to the elements began to take a toll on the building. By the 1960s, it underwent some minor improvements to keep it current with the styles of the day. A second series of improvements took place in the 1980s, followed by further repairs and adaptations in 2003, 2004, and 2009. These changes and repairs evidenced that the building could not sustain any more repairs. It was no longer functional for the current purposes, but its foundation was worth keeping. In 2010, a major renovation project was put in place.

The project left the *foundation* and the *façade* untouched, while renovating everything inside to adapt to the needs of today.



This is an important illustration of what true renewal is all about: renewal requires us to keep our foundation and identity intact (our doctrine and Core Values) while adapting our structures and systems to the realities of our generation.

We have witnessed Nazarenes applying this important principle as they review their ministry paradigms and models without compromising one bit of our doctrine, values, and mission. The historical account of Nazarenes during our first century as a denomination shows that the common thread throughout every stage has been our unwavering commitment to the message of holiness and the mission of God to redeem His creation. This is true in spite of the changes and shifts in practices, structures, and mission strategies. Though they have changed and evolved, our message, doctrine, and mission have not and should not.

The quest for renewal has been evident in the United States and Canada where the church is exploring creative models and methods to plant new churches. With the support of Bob Broadbooks and his team, districts in the USA/Canada Region have experienced a renewed emphasis on church planting, using both traditional and non-traditional models. The result is evident in the use of a missional language, an outward approach, and a visionary means to reach the unchurched in this part of the world.

The multi-congregational church, the multi-site church, the organic church, and the cowboy church are examples of this non-traditional emphasis on church planting. While these churches may look (and indeed do look) different from what we are accustomed to, they still remain loyal “Christian, Holiness, and Missional” congregations. ([Vimeo.com/57460777](https://vimeo.com/57460777))

Our theological educational institutions have also modeled this emphasis on methodological shift without compromising our Core Values. While residential education was the model of choice in most of our theological institutions during the second half of last century, the economic, social, and ministry realities have forced institutions to review their approach.

With much care and reflection, and in spite of criticism and fear, many theological institutions took the leap of faith by moving from their traditional residential models to theological education by extension.

What was a rare exception in the early 1970s is now a norm in most of these institutions around the world, many of which are currently exploring the possibility of online education as a way to adapt, respond, and prepare. These shifts have by no means represented a compromise of our doctrinal orthodoxy and integrity.

While the systems and the delivery methods have changed, these institutions have not shifted—and we pray will not shift—our Wesleyan-Arminian doctrinal core.

One of the most frequent requests that comes to the general superintendents and those at the GMC is for help in explaining the Church of the Nazarene—who it is and what it believes. There are many new Nazarenes who lack understanding of our church.

To answer this call for help and to cast the vision for renewal while strengthening our core, this year the Board of General Superintendents is launching *Nazarene Essentials*—a resource tool for church leaders. This is not a new emphasis or a new project, but it is the affirmation and compilation of key elements that identify us as Nazarenes worldwide.

Nazarene Essentials was officially launched at M15, the USA/Canada evangelism conference held earlier this month here in Kansas City. It was made available through a special edition of *Holiness Today* as well as online at nazarene.org/essentials with downloadable resources and a leader's guide. It will be available in multiple languages for the remaining Global Mission regional conferences in 2015 and 2016.

This is the first edition of *Nazarene Essentials*. As we get feedback, our goal is to improve this publication for the benefit of our pastors and laity around the world. Let us know what you think and how we can improve communication of our Core Values, theology, and mission.

In spite of our diversity, we believe there are things that identify us universally: our doctrine, our ecclesiology, our Articles of Faith, our Core Values, our Mission Statement, and our Characteristics of a Missional Church.

Therefore, we encourage all levels of denominational leadership to embrace these essentials, to promote them in the local church, to celebrate them, and to use them in order to foster a unified worldwide Nazarene identity. By strengthening our core, it will be easier to adapt and contextualize our methods and practices without compromising our foundation and identity.

EXPECTING GREAT THINGS FROM GOD!

“Look at the nations and watch—
and be utterly amazed.
For I am going to do something in your days
that you would not believe,
even if you were told.”
Habakkuk 1:5 (NIV)

William Carey, one of the fathers of modern missions, encouraged the church to “Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.” This is a good reminder for us during this time of renewal. God wants to do something FOR the Church of the Nazarene. God wants to do something WITH the Church of the Nazarene. He can do it, and He will do it, but He requires our faith, our commitment, and our obedience.

The Board of General Superintendents passionately believes that God is at work and that He wants to use the Nazarene denomination as part of His plan. He has a vision for our future. We need to embrace His vision.

The Commission on the Nazarene Future, assigned to work during the past quadrennium, projected that by the year 2030 (15 years from now) we could have five million members in 83,000 churches. This is just a projection, an extrapolation of our past ministry as we look forward. But these are only numbers.

When the projections were made, the numbers were in an upward trend. Today we have seen the possibility of a slowdown of that trend. Do we need to restate the numbers? Do we need to project in a different direction?

We believe that we serve the God of the impossible, the God of the unbelievable. We believe that He will do something unbelievable, hard to project, and even hard to grasp. And yet, we expect it with thanksgiving, we expect it with joy. We expect it because if we can dream the vision of five million Nazarenes in 83,000 churches by the year 2030, we also believe that He can do it for us and with us.

Do you see what we see? Do you see the large global family of Nazarenes reaching every corner of this globe with the message of holiness? Do you see five million Nazarenes worshipping in more than 80,000 congregations by 2030? The God of “the immeasurably more” sees it. And as long as we obediently surrender our will and our ways to His will, His ways, and His vision, what we see may even fall short of what He has in store for us.

We do not want this to be just a goal-setting exercise. We want this to be the vision of every Nazarene in every local church for our generation! With that in mind, the Board of General Superintendents is encouraging each local church in each district in every region to prayerfully consider its faith projections in five-year increments and plan accordingly. The first step would be a plan for “Vision 2020 Faith Projection,” whereby the church will reach 3.5 million total members, with 2.5 million in worship attendance, 2.5 million in Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries International attendance, in 50,000 churches. These incremental projections would certainly help the denomination reach the vision set forth for the next fifteen years.

Write down the vision and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the vision awaits an appointed time: it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay (Habakkuk 2:2–3).

So, as we embrace the vision of God for the people of God called Nazarenes, let’s celebrate the legacy of the past with gratitude, let’s join God’s movement already in place around us, let’s embrace the need for renewal, and let’s expect great things from God as we attempt great things for Him!

Respectfully and prayerfully submitted,

Board of General Superintendents

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1 Called Unto Holiness Vol. II

2 Cash receipts from general treasurer’s office for each of these categories may be different from general secretary’s report. (Insert cash receipt totals for WEF, Mission Specials and Other).

3 18,906 churches reporting financial data.

Closing Prayer
2015 General Board Report

Read in unison:

Thank you, Lord, for where we have been, where we are.

Now what? Where do you want us to go next?

Give us your eyes and ears to see and hear what you see and hear.

Give us your heart and hand to reach those you love.

Give us a willingness to exchange the security of our comfort
for the adventure of your commission.

Give us the Holy Spirit's vision, willingness, courage, and power to
accomplish your mission to:

- Seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10)
- Sanctify them by the truth—your word is truth (John 17:17)
- Be moved with compassion for the multitudes (Matthew 9:36); and
- To make Christlike disciples in the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything you have commanded. (Matthew 28: 16-20)

Amen