



**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
BOARD OF GENERAL SUPERINTENDENTS TO THE
101st GENERAL BOARD CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE**

23 February 2025

Johannesburg, South Africa

“Centers of Holy Fire”

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Introduction

We have gathered here in Johannesburg, South Africa for our General Board meeting. This is only the second time, in the history of our denomination, that the General Board has met outside of the United States, and it is significant that we would be meeting on the great continent of Africa. We agree with Philip Jenkins, who said, Christianity is “a religion that began in ancient Africa and in our lifetime has chosen to go home.”¹ Jenkins has declared that every denomination in the world is in a state of transition, and the major influence for change is coming from the global south to the global north. This is the time for us to listen to each other’s voices and to allow God to shape and form us in new ways.²

For us Nazarenes, we come to Africa, and we see what God has done through the power of the Holy Spirit. More than a century ago, Dr. Phineas Bresee challenged the people called Nazarenes:

Christ in us, with the Holy Spirit anointing to work in and through us His message, is the great need of the hour for the task before us. It is our business primarily to get heaven opened and the divine glory down in mighty supernatural power. We must have people on fire with the Holy Spirit and make and keep centers of holy fire wherever we go... It can be done for there is enough holy fire in heaven.³

Centers of holy fire. This was the vision of early leaders like John Wesley, Phineas Bresee, and Hiram Reynolds, who saw that the preaching of scriptural holiness could be transformational. Throughout the years, the Church of the Nazarene has been committed to the mission of making Christlike disciples in the nations. I think Bresee would say that we have been committed to having centers of holy fire through people who are *on* fire with the Holy Spirit in the nations. Our very presence here in Africa bears witness to the embrace of our mission.

Thanks

Hosting a General Board meeting outside of the Kansas City area brings with it unique challenges, and we would like to recognize the entire team that has made this 101st meeting of the General Board in Johannesburg, South Africa, possible:

- We thank our general secretary, Dr. Gary Hartke, and his team, including Kelsey Main, administrative director, Jeff Gray, legislative coordinator, Julie Poole, meetings and events planner, and Tara Smith, administrative coordinator. This team has gone above and beyond to make this General Board meeting possible.

¹ Philip Jenkins, “The Future of Seminaries and Churches” (San Antonio, Texas, February 9, 2015), to ATS presidents.

² Carla D. Sunberg; Gomis, Daniel A.K.L.. *Color: God's Intention for Diversity*. The Foundry Publishing. Kindle Edition. p. 32

³ Highlights from the *Journal of the 2nd District Assembly of the Nebraska District, September 9-13, 1914*. PF Bresee, Presiding.

- We thank the Africa Region, Dr. Dany Gomis, and his entire team, including Gauteng, District Superintendent Craig Brophy, Theola Phiri, Esteban Murillo, Loreal Burton, Nigel Beta, and Edwin Tladi, for partnering with the General Secretary's office to put together all of the details of this meeting.
- We are grateful for all the interpreters, translators, I.T. personnel, and communication specialists who work tirelessly to provide a seamless flow for these proceedings.
- We thank Joy Hartke and the support team in the Board of General Superintendents' office for the careful work of coordinating this session of the General Board.

STATISTICS

We celebrate what God has done in and through the Church of the Nazarene this past year. Currently, we have 28,846 active churches, centers of holy fire, around the globe. While we know that there are areas where some of our churches did not survive pandemics, wars, or other types of unrest, we also note that three regions have shown the highest number of organized churches in their history this last year: Asia-Pacific, Mesoamerica, and South America.

Although our planting of new churches has not yet rebounded from the COVID-19 pandemic, we added 387 new churches last year, and for this, we thank the Lord.

The good news is that we have an additional 7,000 church plants and church-type missions, sparks, bringing light to the church's missional enterprise.

World Evangelism Fund

In 2024, through the generous giving of Nazarenes around the world, the Church of the Nazarene raised 38.5 million dollars US for the World Evangelism Fund, surpassing our 2023 giving by 1.3 million dollars. This is an amazing 3.5% growth!

We celebrate this impressive outpouring of love while realizing that the need remains great. The Lord's global call to share the gospel continues to grow, and millions still need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Right now, World Evangelism giving does not cover all ministry costs. To sustain and grow our efforts, we need full participation from every church and individual.

Credentials

Each one of our ministers carries with them a spark. In 2024, we ordained 1008 elders and deacons. This is only the second time in our history that we have ordained more than 1000 ministers in a year, with the other being the year following COVID when we were catching up. Along with this increase, districts reported a total of 31,688 ordained and district-licensed ministers, an overall increase of 334 from 2023. The 2024 total includes 19,990 ordained elders, reflecting a 3.46% increase from 2023 and a 17.5% decadal increase; 895 ordained deacons, reflecting a .2% increase from last year and a 6.8% increase over the past decade; and 10,803

district licensed ministers, which marks a 3% decrease from last year but a 9.7% increase over the past decade.

The General Secretary cataloged and preserved 143 credentials in 2024. Of these, 52 were filed due to inactivity, 21 were resigned, 41 were revoked, and 29 were surrendered.

Missionaries

This year, we have commissioned 13 missionaries from four countries. We thank the Lord for those who have answered the call, and are praying for those whom God will call in the years ahead. We continue to invite people to “The Cause” of missions and of following Jesus Christ.

TRANSITIONS

Farewell

Lola Brickey

Nazarene Missions International Director Lola Brickey retired from her position in January 2025 after 10 years of leadership. In addition to serving NMI as global director, she has also served as a local and district NMI president, a representative and vice president of the Global NMI Council, and representative to the General Board. On behalf of the Board of General Superintendents and the entire Church of the Nazarene, we thank Lola for her 40 years of service.

Mark Brown

After nearly 40 years of service at The Foundry Publishing, Mark Brown retired as president and CEO in January 2025. During his tenure, Mark held several positions in support of the publishing house’s mission to provide holiness literature and music for the church. In 2017, Mark led the organization in its efforts to take the Wesleyan-Holiness message to the world by rebranding from Nazarene Publishing House to doing business as The Foundry Publishing. We thank Mark for his many years of service to the Church of the Nazarene.

Brian Helstrom

JESUS Film Harvest Partners Executive Director Brian Helstrom stepped down from his leadership role in January after more than 20 years of service. In August of 1997, Brian witnessed the historic meeting where a partnership agreement between the Jesus Film Project (Campus Crusade for Christ International) and World Mission, Church of the Nazarene, was developed. Soon after, he was asked to lead this ministry effort, and in September 2003, Brian was named executive director of *JESUS* Film Harvest Partners. At that time, 254 teams of nationals were serving in approximately 50 countries using 16mm reel-to-reel or VHS equipment. Today, 1,117 teams are carrying on that work in 67 countries using the *JESUS* film and other gospel media in hundreds of different languages, using solar-powered backpacks.

Brian will remain on missionary assignment with a focus on helping to raise funds for Global Missions initiatives, including *JESUS* Film Harvest Partners.

In Memoriam

Greg Hephner

Gregory Hephner, a member of the Church of the Nazarene General Board and chairman of the *JESUS* Film Harvest Partners Board of Trustees, passed away 21 February 2024. He was a member of the Wichita, Kansas, USA, First Church of the Nazarene for more than 30 years, where he led a Bible study, played percussion, led mission trips, and volunteered for almost any project that came up. Greg will be remembered as a passionate servant leader committed to sharing the love of Christ with others.

Missionaries

We are also grateful for the lives and service of our missionaries around the world. Since our last report, six retired missionaries, and one current missionary, received their eternal reward. Their combined service totaled 148 years for the Church of the Nazarene and the Kingdom of God.

New Leaders

Jim Ritchie

At our previous gathering in February 2024, the General Board elected Jim Ritchie to serve as director of Global Missions. Jim followed Verne Ward, who retired in April 2024. At the time of his election, Jim was serving as Eurasia regional director. He previously served as superintendent of the British Isles North District and as a pastor and director of several nonprofits. Jim carries a personal passion for helping the church realize centers of holy fire throughout the world.

Mark Louw

The Board of General Superintendents announced the election of Mark Louw as director of the Eurasia Region in June 2024. Louw succeeds Jim Ritchie. Louw previously served as Regional Director of the Asia-Pacific Region for 12 years and as a pastor, missionary, and field strategy coordinator. The diverse experiences of Dr. Louw have prepared him well for this assignment.

Kafoa Muaror

In July 2024, the Board of General Superintendents elected Fiji native Kafoa Muaror to the position of Asia-Pacific regional director. Muaror succeeds Mark Louw. At the time of his election, Muaror was field strategy coordinator for Melanesia South Pacific, overseeing the denomination's work in Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu. He has also served as a district superintendent, missionary, and pastor as well as president of the General Board. His passion and experience will serve the region well, and we look forward to this new phase of the church in Asia-Pacific.

Sam Barber

The Board of General Superintendents announced the election of Dr. Sam Barber as director of Nazarene Discipleship International in June 2024. Barber follows Scott Rainey, who returned to local church ministry in February 2024. Barber previously served as superintendent of the South Central Ohio District. We look forward to NDI's future under his leadership.

Cheryl Crouch

In December 2024, following the retirement announcement of Lola Brickey, the Board of General Superintendents announced the election of Cheryl Crouch as director of Nazarene Missions International. Cheryl serves on the General Board and has participated in Nazarene Missions in various capacities, including on the field as a missionary, and as the NMI president for the West Texas District. The Board of General Superintendents and the church welcome Cheryl to this new role, which will become officially effective June 1.

GOOD NEWS! CENTERS OF HOLY FIRE

In January, nearly 250 young leaders gathered at Third Wave, a global Nazarene Youth International conference for emerging youth leaders, for a time of training, discipleship, fellowship, and worship. The participants were able to hear about the journeys of others who have been exactly where they are now, including Central Europe Field Strategy Coordinator Cezarina Glendenning, who received her call to ministry at Third Wave in 2007. They learned about the different forms that ministry can take, from discipleship and compassion, to communications and education. Many of the participants were able to confirm their calling. These young leaders have now traveled home to 51 different countries to share the fire that was kindled in them.

While those young leaders were gathering, 80 new believers were baptized in the Nile River in South Sudan, the same Nile River where the baby Moses was drawn up out of the water and saved for a greater purpose. These believers from the New Life Church of the Nazarene in Juba South, South Sudan, were saved under the teaching and preaching of Pastor Paul Abaan. This church is only six months old, and it already has 89 new believers who have been baptized. Despite hardships and unimaginable conditions, on 8 January 2025, an additional 25 new believers were baptized at a South Sudanese refugee camp in Uganda. There is a holy fire spreading in South Sudan!

Nazarene Compassionate Ministries (NCM) – The women's empowerment project in Ethiopia recognizes and encourages the potential of 100 women by providing literacy and numeracy education, business skills classes, business start-up support, and mentorship for starting their own beekeeping and beauty therapy businesses.

The project ensured the 100 participants had proper documentation and opened bank accounts needed to start their businesses. The group harvested their first batch of honey, which was 100kgs from 15 beehives, and participants began saving their earnings. Additionally, support groups have met to discuss a variety of topics, including forgiveness and stress management.

A participant reflected on the impact of the project. "The lives of many people in the village have changed," she said. "The program has made us see things differently. I believe this village will change. We are growing, and with financial freedom, both women and men will be able to look for better opportunities. I want my children to go to school and have a better future. I imagine that they will become doctors and engineers and change my life and the life of our village."

CHALLENGES

The closing of a Nazarene college has been a traumatic event, and we recognize the challenges that were faced by Eastern Nazarene College, Boston area, USA. These are difficult days for Christian higher education, as we navigate an ever-changing landscape. The holy fire from Eastern Nazarene College continues to live on in and through the faculty and alumni who have been a part of the institution. This was a center of holy fire from which sparks were spread around the world, and while the home-fire may no longer be burning, the total impact around the globe is great. At the same time, we recognize that a health check-up of our institutions is vital, and we thank Dr. Klaus Arnold for the work that he and his team are putting into the reviews of our schools around the globe.

The challenges to our identity are also great. The early leaders of the Church of the Nazarene would have said that there were times when it appeared the holy fire might be extinguished, but it continues to burn. If we think that what we face today is new, every generation has had to wrestle with who we are as a people called Nazarene.

In the past year, the church has seen a number of ecclesial charges, which have been painful in the life of the church. While we do have excellent judicial resources and processes, it is also the hope and prayer of the BGS that the pastors and leaders of the church would embrace the commitment made at ordination to remain in covenant with the Church of the Nazarene, accepting its order, doctrine, and discipline, defending it against all doctrines contrary to God's Holy Word, and committing to be accountable with those serving as colleagues, and those appointed to supervise the ministry. When there are difficulties, we encourage all parties to work through *Manual 603* regarding "Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation in the Church," utilizing both informal and formal processes with the goal of reconciliation. At the same time, we encourage the use of *Manual 604*, seeking to find resolution to disciplinary matters by agreement, utilizing the judicial process as a last resort.

There are places where the world remains at war and Nazarenes find themselves in the midst of that conflict. Our people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are facing a desperate

situation. There is armed conflict involving M23 militants who are creating a perilous humanitarian crisis. We have two districts that have been impacted.

We pray for the war between Russia and Ukraine and that God would bring peace. In the midst of that great challenge, we were able to ordain six individuals from the former Soviet Union last year, including two from Russia and two from Ukraine.

While the Middle East is torn by tensions and war, we rejoice that God continues to meet with our people. In an assembly this month in Beirut, Lebanon, nine people received their district minister's license. Our field strategy coordinator for the Western Mediterranean reported on the center of holy fire in Ashrafiya: "The Lord was pouring his presence and love in the hearts of many people. I praise the Lord to see believers in this church who came from different backgrounds, young and old men and women from all majority and minority backgrounds, but they all became one family in Christ Jesus, praise God." The challenges of this world will not quench the Spirit's centers of Holy Fire.

QUADRENNIAL TASKS OF THE BGS

The Board of General Superintendents has identified a number of areas, or issues, that need to be addressed during this quadrennium and to which we are giving particular focus and attention.

- 1.** Global Missions. During the previous quadrennium, the "Missions Project" was led by Dr. Gustavo Crocker and resulted in the current sending model for missionaries. It is time for this model to be reviewed to make it more accessible to the local church, so that we can help to create and keep more centers of holy fire around the world. Dr. Crocker continues to chair a group that has been commissioned to review the previous work and to make any recommendations or suggestions for future changes.
- 2.** Nazarene Missions International NMI is vital to the missional enterprise of the church. Keeping the message of missions before our congregations globally is vital, and the infrastructure necessary for this to happen on a greater scale must exist. To this end, NMI will be moved into Global Missions so that there can be shared resources and an increased partnership between the structure that sends and the vast volunteer organization that helps to inspire and educate the church. NMI will be a partner at the table in the review of the "Missions Project." Dr. Carla Sunberg is helping to shepherd the transition with NMI, in partnership with Rev. Jim Ritchie, Global Missions director, and Cheryl Crouch, our new global NMI Director.
- 3.** Nazarene Discipleship International. The transition in leadership in NDI was of particular importance to the Board of General Superintendents. For a denomination with the mission statement that includes making Christlike disciples, this ministry remains at the core of who we are and what we do. Dr. David Busic, chair of the Board of General

Superintendents, has been working closely with Dr. Sam Barber on the ways in which we can enhance NDI to meet the needs of a growing global church.

4. Nazarene Higher Education. The closure of Eastern Nazarene College in Boston has raised a number of questions for the denomination, and especially for the USA/Canada region. Dr. Scott Daniels has been tasked to work with the USA/Canada college and university presidents to work toward addressing questions and concerns. A survey was sent to all the Presidents to help identify the areas of greatest challenge. All of the presidents responded with meaningful input on ways in which there can be greater collaboration.
5. General Church Financial Sustainability Study. The *Study on General Church Financial Sustainability and Mission Funding Models* from the Board of General Superintendents has been presented at this General Board meeting. This is in response to the 2023 General Administration and Finance Committee (GAFC) Resolution calling for a report to the General Board at its 2024 Session.

Over the past two years, the BGS has taken several actions to begin the GAFC study. The first half of 2023 was dedicated to preparing for the 30th General Assembly in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA, where the quadrennial report included an update on the denomination's financial position and noted that the church would need to address questions raised by the current funding model within the coming quadrennium.

A year ago, General Superintendent Dr. Filimão Chambo shared in the Annual Report to the General Board that financial sustainability is a priority for the Board of General Superintendents. In the past year, a sustainability Study Committee was appointed to examine the GAFC Resolution and make recommendations to the BGS. Some initial steps have already been taken, and the report presented at this General Board meeting shows how more can be done in the short term, as well as long-term proposals.

6. Foundry Transition. We are grateful that Mark Parker has stepped into the role of interim leadership with Nazarene Publishing House, also known as The Foundry Publishing. The board of the Foundry and the Board of General Superintendents, working together, are looking at a redesigned model for sustainability of NPH into the future, and a greater integration into the mission of the church.
7. Nazarene Identity. This is an ongoing project from the previous quadrennium and is led by Drs. Crocker and Sunberg. Our corporate identity has been defined and affirmed and includes our mission statement, core values, our beliefs or Articles of Faith, and our agreed upon practices, which include our covenants. At this time, the Identity Task Force is working on both formational and informational aspects, and creating a framework for dissemination. The Foundry will release two volumes expounding on the Covenant of Christian Conduct from the *Manual*. Specifically, these are, “The Christian

Life,” and “Human Sexuality,” written by members of the Board of General Superintendents.

8. The 2023 General Assembly referred 11 resolutions, and the creation of the Study Committee on Calling and Lay Ministry, to the Board of General Superintendents. Three committees have been appointed to study these resolutions.

The Christian Action and Church Program Committee is working on the Sanctity of Human Life (*Manual* paragraph 30), Capital Punishment (a new paragraph to the *Manual* appendix), and the possible creation of the ministry: Nazarene Evangelism International.

The Judiciary Study Group has been assigned further study of the Dedication Ritual (*Manual* paragraph 703), Prevenient Grace (Article of Faith VII), Creation and Humanity (a new *Manual* paragraph), and Sin, Original and Personal (Article of Faith V).

The Study Commission on Calling and Lay Ministry was created by action of the 2023 General Assembly to study the theology of our calling and ministry (*Manual* Part VI: Ministry and Christian Service). They will also study Orders of Ministry (*Manual* paragraphs 525-526.2), Ministry of Layperson & Licensed Lay Ministers (*Manual* paragraphs 503-503.9), and Local Minister’s Certification (*Manual* paragraphs 523-523.7).

Every member of the Board of General Superintendents has responsibility to a committee and to follow-up regarding these referrals. Each group has met at least once this past year and will continue their work throughout this quadrennium.

THE FIRE OF AFRICA AND BEYOND!

Before the union that created the Church of the Nazarene in 1908, a missionary, Harmon Schmelzenbach, had come to Africa. Because of the burning passion to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to this continent, Harmon and his wife, Lula, sacrificed to share the fire that they had experienced.

We are all called to a life of radical discipleship in which the fire of the Holy Spirit burns brightly. Have you ever watched the flame on a gas stove? The color of the flame can vary from yellow to orange to red or blue. Certain types of gases burn blue, while wood, coal, or candles will burn yellow, orange, or red. Interestingly, if a gas stove is not burning blue, it has a problem, because blue is a sign of complete combustion. Complete combustion occurs when there is an excellent air supply and the flame can burn extremely hot, leaving no soot or ash.⁴

⁴Eric Hahn. *Blue Flame vs Yellow Flame vs Red Flames - Gas Flame Color*, LPG Gas Blog. Accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.elgas.com.au/blog/1585-why-does-a-gas-flame-burn-blue-lpg-gas-natural-propane-methane>

Our spiritual lives are to burn blue. This is a life which is fed by the oxygen of the Holy Spirit, allowing for complete and total submission to the will of God, reflecting Christ completely. No matter where we find ourselves in the world, we find that scripture leave us with a pattern for discipleship where the heat of the spiritual life is turned up by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Hiram Reynolds carried a spark with him everywhere he went, and hoped that he would leave a center of holy fire in every nation. Nazarene missionary, S. C. Krikorian, answered the call to take the spark to Jerusalem. He was visited by Dr. Reynolds, and the two of them were willing to sacrifice for the fire to burn in the Middle East.

On December 3rd, 1921 Reynolds and Krikorian had spent the night in prayer, heading to the Mount of Olives at around 3 a. m. on December 4th, to spend time praying at the site of Jesus' ascension into Heaven...On Christmas Eve, Reynolds and Brother Krikorian took a train from Damascus...The route took them past Mount Carmel, reminding Reynolds of the story of the prophet Elijah "praying on its top till the fire of God came down," confessing that, in spite of the chill wind, his own "soul is set aflame with Holy Ghost fire, and my whole being is not only warm toward God, but is filled with a holy flame of gratitude."⁵

That same fire from Mount Carmel eventually spilled into the city of Jerusalem where, on the day of Pentecost, the disciples shone with the fire from heaven. A 19th century Christian writer, Rev. W. Arthur, had a great impact on the holiness movement and especially on Dr. Bresee. Arthur wrote, "On the day of Pentecost Christianity faced the world, a new religion, and a poor one, without a history, without a priesthood, without a college, without a people, and without a patron. She had only her two sacraments and her ...fire."⁶

As we reflect on the year 2024, we recognize that the difficulty of Bresee's challenge was in the task of not just making, but also keeping, centers of holy fire. There are many different ways in which someone can build a fire. It may be in a fireplace in a home, or a great bonfire in the outdoors. The types of material used to kindle the fire vary from place to place, as does the material necessary to keep the fire burning long and strong. That's why it's exciting to see and embrace the holy centers of fire in different contexts, for there is a danger in the single story.

The Regional Director for Africa, Dr. Dany Gomis, introduced me to the Nigerian author and novelist, Chimamanda Adichie. In a TED talk, she warns us of the danger in what she calls "a single story." She says, "Show people as one thing over and over again, and that's what they become."⁷ She warns that we risk critical and cultural misunderstanding when we fail to understand that every life, every situation, has its own unique story.

⁵ Shea, Mary Lou. *In Need of Your Prayers and Patience: The Life and Ministry of Hiram F. Reynolds and the Founding of the Church of the Nazarene*. Resource Publications, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers. Kindle Edition. Location 7951.

⁶ Rev. W. Arthur, MA, *The Tongue of Fire: Or, the True Power of Christianity*, London, 1901, 31.

⁷ Chimamanda Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*, TED Talk 2009. Accessed Sept. 1, 2020, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en

What is the Danger of a Single Story? Adichie says,

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. When we hear the same story over and over again, it becomes the only story we ever believe. And this stands especially true for the story of Africa. Too often do we hear this version—Africa, the poorest “country” in the world where only rural landscapes exist and where people live in terror amongst wild animals. Too often do we treat Africa as one narrative, one we have fostered over generations and generations, becoming so institutionalized that even those who graduated from universities will sometimes slip and refer to Africa as a country or their language as “African.” This is the danger of a single story, and it brings to mind a quote by American writer Alvin Toffler: “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.”⁸

We must learn to unlearn perpetuated stereotypes, in order to allow ourselves to see that there is more than one narrative, to anything, really. For the Church of the Nazarene is not seeking uniformity, but unity through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We can look out across the continents and see that centers of holy fire are not all the same, but are beautifully formed by the Holy Spirit. That is what we celebrate here in Africa and at this particular General Board meeting.

Adiche goes on to say, “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.”⁹

John the Baptist led the way by sharing a vision for a future that would impact the whole world. He told those who were listening to his preaching, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”¹⁰ The uniting single story is Jesus, who reaches out to every nation, tribe, and people, and baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire. The result is holy centers of fire, through the work that Christ has done in this world. This is why we are called to make Christlike disciples in the nations, as a church, preaching scriptural holiness as we make and keep holy centers of fire around the globe.

When we gather as God’s people, whether here on the continent of Africa, in South America, Europe, or India, we have a story! Here in Africa, we often harken back to the story of Harmon Schmelzenbach. However, he and his wife were not the only ones who helped to spread centers of holy fire. In the early years of the work here in South Africa, we had missionaries coming from the kingdom of eSwatini, both those of European descent and Africans – some of whom

⁸ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, Bantam Books, 1970.

⁹ Adichie, TED talk.

¹⁰ Luke 3:16.

were Nazarenes, and some from the Independent Holiness Mission from England who would some-day become Nazarenes. We had work in the area of Arthurseat and Acornhoek. Eventually the work spread to other parts of this country, including Johannesburg, KwaZulu-Natal – Durban – Cape Town and far beyond.

One of our great fathers of the church here in Africa is Dr. Enoch Litswele. He reminds us that we should take the time to remember our story, including the fact that “the early African Nazarenes had a good understanding of the core values of the Church of the Nazarene.” “They knew what it was to be a Christian people.” They were “united with all believers in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ.” He tells us, “These were people who were born and brought up in pagan environments and when they were converted into Christianity and accepted Jesus as their Lord, they knew what they were doing and their change was genuine and radical.” The fire fell here in Africa.

“Secondly,” Dr. Litswele tells us, “our pioneers were a holiness people. Following their genuine repentance they were led to the experience of entire sanctification. Their faith through which they accepted the Lord as their Saviour and sanctifier was a childlike faith. It was like a child-mother relationship ... in which a child knows, loves, and has full confidence in his mother even though he does not know the full details and implications of motherhood. Likewise, they too did not know the deep theological and technical implications of the doctrine of salvation as we do, or think we do today. What they knew so well was the Person who saved them from their sin and entirely sanctified them.”¹¹

“Thirdly,” Dr. Litswelle shared that, “our pioneers were a missional people. Their mission of worship was meaningful and blessed with the presence of God. They began their worship, which was ... God centred and not self-centred, with silence, prayer, and reverence on their knees. Their church music, their hymns and choruses, were appealing to the heart and not only to the emotions. It was... spiritually uplifting and touching ... The preaching of the Word was accompanied by spontaneous ‘Amen’s’ that freely came from the depths of the hearts of the worshippers. The ... altar services were blessed with times of prayer where tears of repentance, surrender, commitment, and of joy were shed by both seekers and altar workers. At these altar services enough quality time was spent in prayer, which was followed by testimonies of victory.”¹²

The development of leaders from Africa, and other parts of the world, has been one of the greatest stories of a spark that has grown into a great fire. We thank the Lord for our first general superintendent from Africa, Dr. Eugénio Duarte, and now, Dr. Filimão Chambo. The fire that God has put within their lives burns and is leaving sparks all around the world. Other sparks that have grown into great fires include our first general superintendent from Meso-America, Dr. Gustavo Crocker, and our first general superintendent from South America, Dr. Christian Sarmiento.

¹¹ Litswele, 121.

¹² Ibid, 122.

It's exciting to embrace the good stories, but if we are to be honest, we have to be willing to recount our whole story. Here in Africa, there are centers burning brightly, but not all of our history was positive.

The work in South Africa was complicated, as the country wrestled with apartheid and the Church of the Nazarene chose not to speak out about the injustices that were being perpetrated. It is a part of our history, and it is painful. We continue to feel its effects to this day, as the current landscape of the church in this country is defined by how we functioned in the past. Regrettably, we made poor and, at times, inappropriate decisions. The actions and inactions of the church created pain, and this is part of our story. We recognize that the situation should have been handled differently. On behalf of the leaders, the missionaries, and the policies of the Church of the Nazarene during the period of apartheid, we offer our deepest regret and ask for forgiveness.

The good news of Jesus Christ is that the wounds that we as humans may inflict upon one another can be healed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit becomes the sweet anointing balm that heals us from the inside out. This is why we need centers of holy fire.

This is a new day, and we lean into, not only the fires of the past, but the new fires that the Spirit is helping, and will help, to burn brightly. Today, Christianity has swept South Africa and spread throughout much of the continent. When the fire first came, near 1900, there were 100 million people on the entire African continent and 10% were Christians. Today, there are over 1.2 billion people in Africa and 50% are Christians.

Yes, much of Africa is now Christian, but the challenge for the future will be to live out a vibrant Christian life. Once something becomes “normalized” it’s easy to become complacent. This is a challenge for every region, now and in the future. Have we experienced the fire of heaven? Are we making and keeping centers of holy fire?

We are a holiness people. The passion of Bresee and Reynolds was for the Holy Spirit to be poured out and for these centers of holy fire to develop around the world. We believe in the transformational work of the Holy Spirit to lead us into a deeper walk with Jesus Christ. We can be changed, even now, into disciples who become more and more like Jesus.

The sparks that we bring with us mean that we are a missional people. A hundred years ago, missionaries gave of themselves to come to Africa and share the story of Jesus. They were driven by their love for God, which was revealed in the overflow of love for others. They were willing to sacrifice their lives and the lives of their family members for others to know Christ. I’ve had the privilege of visiting Piggs Peak and the mission station at Enzengedi. Harmon Schmelzenbach is buried there, but it was the grave of his baby that moved me to tears. The center of holy fire came and stayed.

As we leave this historic General Board session, may we be sent out by the words of Dr. Bresee's prayer. May we go to make and keep centers of holy fire.

Respectfully and prayerfully submitted,

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