ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

BOARD OF GENERAL SUPERINTENDENTS

TO THE

90th GENERAL BOARD

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

24 February 2013

The Radical Optimism of Grace

Introduction

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

Titus 2:11 (NIV)

On behalf of the Board of General Superintendents (BGS), I greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and formally welcome you to the 90th General Board Session of the Church of the Nazarene. The history of this setting is a reminder that general superintendents, general officers, and directors are accountable to the denomination for their respective areas of responsibility.

The General Board Report represents the ministry and sacrifice of Nazarenes in 159 world areas. Pastors. Laity. Missionaries. Sunday School teachers. Small group leaders. District superintendents. Evangelists. Chaplains. Educators. Compassionate ministry workers. Church staff members and volunteers. They embody the Nazarene Core Values of Christian, Holiness, and Missional.

By God's grace each contributes in various but important ways to the church's mission *to make Christlike disciples in the nations.*

As we begin this presentation, let me underscore one thing: regardless of the culture or season, the church should be more hopeful and optimistic because *we live in a day of God's favor*—not the world's favor, but God's favor and faithfulness.

In 120 days the gavel will come down, opening the 28th General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. On Sunday, 23 June 2013, the people called Nazarenes will gather from around the world to worship and celebrate communion, marking the official opening of General Assembly.

Prayer is underway, led by Nazarene Missions International, as we seek God's presence among us for General Conventions, General Assembly, and safe travel for all who attend. May His Spirit lead our church, both now and into the future.

Preparations for this "family" gathering are well underway, under the direction of General Secretary David Wilson and his staff. They are also responsible for General Board preparations and administration. Please join me in acknowledging Dr. Wilson, Judy Veigl, Susan Metcalf, Shirley Marvin, Diane Miller, and others for their diligent work in making our meetings in Overland Park, Kansas, USA, possible.

This is the fourth and final General Board Session of the quadrennium. We trust that each member will continue to pray for and reach out to his or her prayer partner assigned at our 2011 session in Louisville, Kentucky, USA.

It is through prayer that we commune with God and build lifelong relationships in Jesus Christ.

General Updates

A lot happens in a year.

In April 2012, Eugénio R. Duarte added another "first" to his list of leadership assignments in the Church of the Nazarene. He became the first person of non-Anglo descent to chair the Board of General Superintendents. This responsibility includes supervision of the Global Ministry Center and Nazarene Publishing House.

Also in April, Verne Ward III assumed the position of Global Mission director. For those who have an up-close understanding of this assignment, you know what an overwhelming task this is. Verne Ward has a heart filled with the love of Christ and is a servant leader who cares deeply for the entire world—his new field of mission.

In August 2012, the Nazarene Future Study Group, approved by the 2009 General Assembly, submitted its final report and recommendations to the BGS. Our Board spent time carefully reviewing the information and insights for an improved system of mission that would move us toward a "2030 church." Proposed 2013 General Assembly resolutions were presented to the General Board yesterday, 23 February, 2013.

The BGS is grateful for the work accomplished by this study group led by J. David McClung, chair, and Ken Mills, secretary.

In September, after an extensive search process, the General Board elected Gerald Smith as president of Nazarene Publishing House (NPH). Mr. Smith succeeds C. Hardy Weathers, who retired on November 30, 2012, after serving as NPH president since 1998.

Leaders of 18 denominations convened recently for Global Wesleyan Alliance meetings at the headquarters for Churches of Christ in Christian Union (CCCU) in Circleville, Ohio, USA. This unique partnership was formed in December 2011 to amplify the prophetic voice of Wesleyan-Arminian holiness ministries and to increase effectiveness in spreading scriptural holiness throughout the world.

Thomas Hermiz, CCCU general superintendent, was elected president, and David Graves was elected secretary. The Covenant, created in 2011, was approved in principle by the group.

Transitions

The church noted with sadness the passing of General Superintendent Emeritus William J. Prince on 24 December 2012 at the age of 82. He was elected to the Board of General Superintendents in 1989 and retired in 2001. His long tenure also included service to the church as pastor, district superintendent, and college president.

Longtime General Board members, Ray Cook, a physician from Wichita, Kansas, USA, and Millard Reed, retired president of Trevecca Nazarene University, went to be with the Lord in 2012. The denomination also lost two lay servants, Paul Skiles (youth and communications) and Ray Hendrix (World Mission Radio and Publications). Both were retired from service to the international church.

These godly men provided strong leadership to the church over many years.

Retirements

Three retirements were announced in December 2012.

Jesse C. Middendorf, my former district superintendent in Oklahoma, will be leaving the general superintendency after serving in that role since 2001. Dr. Middendorf has made an impact on my life and ministry, as he has on so many others'. He is a mentor, encourager, colleague, and friend. It has been my privilege to serve with him on the Board of General Superintendents.

I will also be retiring from the BGS following General Assembly. As I wrote to my colleagues, "I value each one of you as a friend, and I deeply appreciate the brotherhood and the encouragement I have received. Indeed it has been a most enjoyable experience to work together with each of you.

"The time has come that I should retire from this role. My plan is to dedicate the rest of my life to my passion of training, resourcing, and encouraging pastors."

The third retirement is that of David J. Felter, general editor, who will be completing his service after the 2013 General Assembly. His faithfulness and his dedication to the Church of the Nazarene in multiple roles at the Global Ministry Center have resulted in quality and theologically sound products for pastors and laity through books, articles, and *Holiness Today*.

Our appreciation goes to Dr. Felter for 50 years of ministry, including 27 at International Headquarters and the GMC.

God's Grace: At Work in the World

My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.

John 5:17 (NIV)

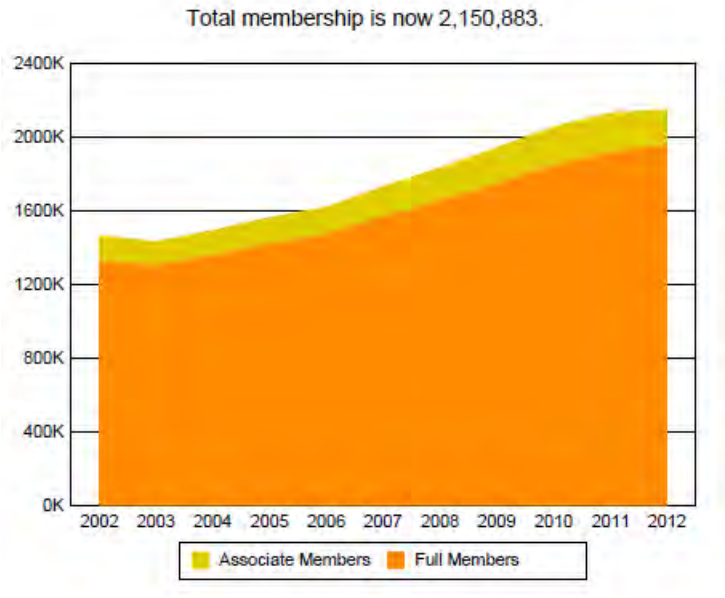
Co-workers in God's Service

As we look at the statistical trends from the past year, we are reminded of Paul's writing to the church at Corinth:

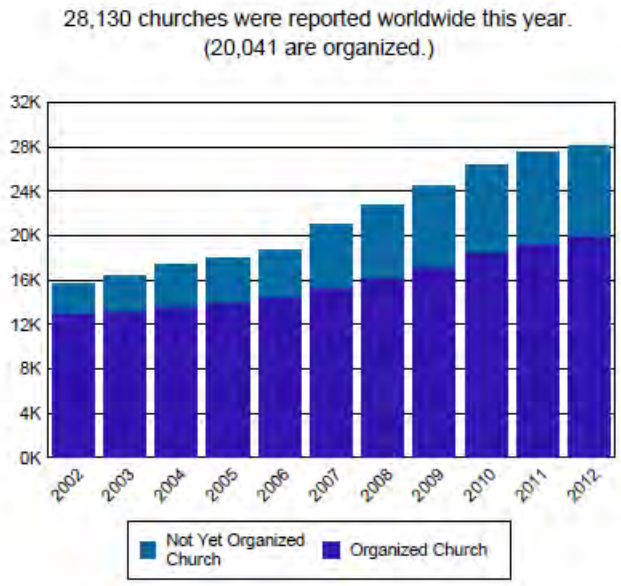
> What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building (1Corinthians 3:5–9, NIV).

The denomination has seen growth in some areas and downward adjustments in others:

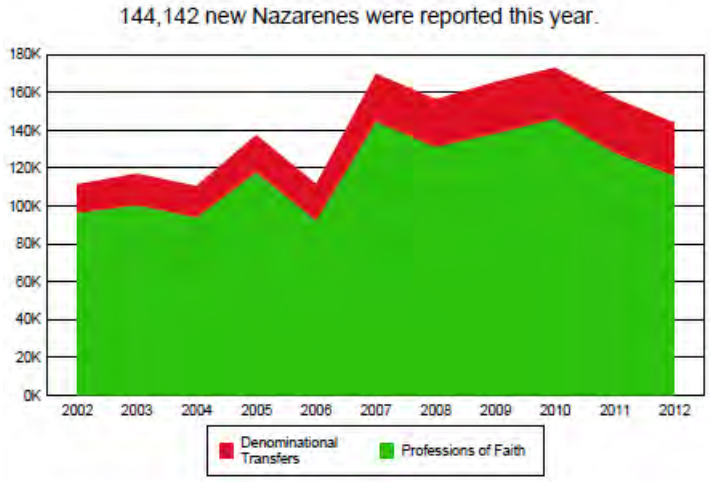
- Total membership is now 2.15 million—a seven-tenths of one percent increase (.7 percent) over 2011, as the church's rate of growth slowed again in 2012.



- There are 28,130 churches, of which 20,041 are organized.



- 144,142 new Nazarenes were reported—an 8.2 percent decrease from the year before—the second year in a row of decrease in the number of new Nazarenes but still the sixth highest total ever reported.



A Closer Look

A more detailed analysis of the general secretary's report shows:

- Only the denomination's smallest churches and newly started churches reported worship gains in 2012.
- Over 45 percent of new Nazarenes in 2012 came from churches that reported less than 100 in worship in 2011.

- Newly reporting churches account for 16 percent (one-in-six) of new Nazarenes in 2012, primarily due to the Africa and Eurasia Regions having large numbers of new churches.

A study by the Nazarene Research Center shows that since 2007, 81 percent of membership growth has come from just 18 of 133 reporting world areas (13 percent). It is worth noting that growth in the church has historically been uneven as movements of God spread around the world.

International Board of Education (IBOE)

Nazarene higher education continues to expand globally. Official enrollment figures for the church's 53 colleges, universities, and seminaries total just over 52,000 degree-seeking students for the 2012 school year. This is an increase of more than 3,000 students from the previous year.

Church Planting

One of the more effective methods of holiness evangelism and disciple making is church planting. We often speak in general terms about "mission," but when it comes to specifics, starting churches is a *must* in Kingdom work.

Jesus said, "I have come to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10). The church should keep in mind that "seek" is an *active* verb.

Starting churches does not always get the attention it deserves, but it can be an effective means of reaching individuals and families with the gospel of Jesus Christ and engaging them in Christian service.

Church planting is one of the most difficult—yet one of the most rewarding—ways we answer God's call to be His witnesses to a lost and hurting world.

I speak not as a distant observer but as a former church-planting pastor.

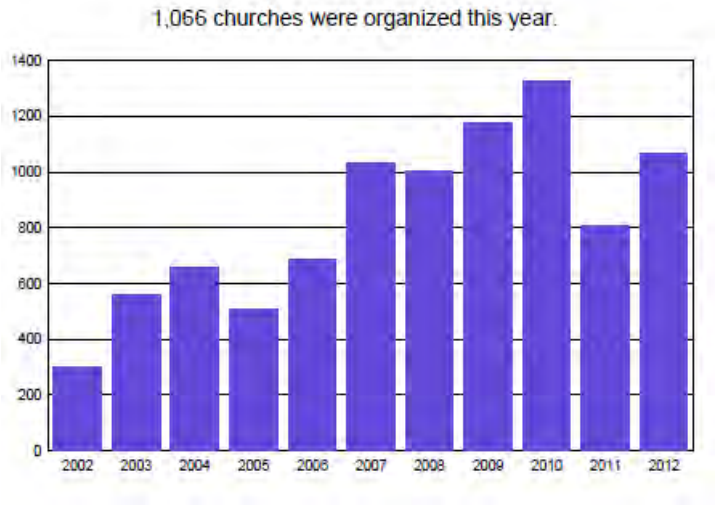
Our Wesleyan-holiness lineage of having revivals, many on the circuit, should inspire us to renew our commitment to church-planting evangelism. Out of these revivals "churches began in houses, barns, groves, schoolhouses, and yes, even taverns," according to Carl Bangs' biography of Phineas Bresee, the first general superintendent for the Church of the Nazarene.[1]

This is how scriptural holiness and the radical optimism of grace were spread throughout the land.

The preaching and testimony of the Wesleyan doctrine and the experience of Christian perfection in these revivals touched the lives of the Bresee family.[2]

Looking back on 2012, we find that:

- 1,066 churches were organized last year—an increase of 259, or a 25 percent gain. For this incredible progress we offer praise and thanksgiving to God, who makes things grow, and to all involved in this ministry—especially pastors and their families, who put so much on the line to help make this happen.



Church planting is a high priority for each Global Mission region. Goals and target locations are established for the coming year. Several regions have involved youth and young adults in their planning.

Keep in mind that we are not just planting churches; we are planting *Nazarene* churches in which holiness theology, mission, and the Great Commandment come together.

Each new church has its own story of prayer, sacrifice, struggle, and fruitfulness. Let me share some stories of God's amazing grace.

Asia-Pacific Region (Sunday evening pre-recorded)

The first church-planting story comes from Papua, New Guinea. It is told by Harmon Schmelzenbach, strategy coordinator for the Melanesia and South Pacific Fields, in the Asia-Pacific Region:

> This last year our Papua New Guinea Islands district superintendent and team leaders were finishing up a couple of intense weeks of training deep in the interior of the rugged island of Bougainville. They knew that in order to catch the only flight out in many days, they would want to leave by four-wheel-drive truck no later than 2 a.m. to give themselves plenty of time.

Everyone was loaded up and heading out by 2 a.m., but soon their journey was slowed with changing multiple flat tires, getting stuck in the deep mud from tropical storms, and fording flooded rivers. They pulled into the small town of Buka just in time to see their airplane disappearing into the distant sky. It was Saturday, and there was no other way out of these islands for two days.

The men found a place to stay for a small fee, and after visiting with the owner of the humble house, they explained that they were Christians and that tomorrow was Sunday, and … "Would it be possible to gather a few people for a church service at your house in the morning?"

The man was not sure what to say, so he said yes. Off to the market they went, splitting up as they began talking to anyone who would listen. By mid-morning the next day, a large crowd of people had gathered at the house of the surprised man, a church service was held, and the love and forgiveness and hope that can only be found through Christ were shared.

Many people accepted the Lord, and a large number gathered afterwards, asking what to do now. The men decided that this was the reason they had missed the airplane. By the time they left the next day, a Nazarene church had been planted and arrangements had been made to get a Bible college student to come as soon as possible to be the first pastor of this new, growing church.

God is always at work and inviting us to join Him if we are willing to expect the unexpected.

USA/Canada Region (Sunday evening pre-recorded)

The next story comes from the USA/Canada Region. We are going to learn what God is doing at Northpoint Community Church of the Nazarene in Beaumont, Texas, USA. The church plant is located on the South Texas District, where Duane Srader is superintendent.

Co-pastors Chris and Lynnlee Moser interned at Trinity Church of the Nazarene in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA, when I was pastor there.

Here are the Mosers:

We rolled into Beaumont, Texas, the last weekend of June 2011. What an overwhelming feeling this was for us. We knew of some people living there who were friends of friends, and we had one personal contact of someone we knew from previous years of ministry.

Often times we would look at each other and ask, “How do you start a church from nothing?” We knew the answer in our hearts—only by the grace of God.

We hit the ground running with the understanding that if God was going to build a church from nothing, we were the instruments He was going to use.

Our prayer force (which was continuing to grow in numbers weekly) was asked to pray very specifically that the Lord would give us God-appointed conversations each and every day. It was incredible to see Him answer this prayer.

Before we knew it, we were connecting with people at the local donut store, at our community pool, at our son’s sports games, and with people in coffee shops. Almost everywhere we went, we encountered an opportunity to connect with someone. Our ears were always open for a chance to introduce ourselves to anyone who seemed interested and explain why we had moved to town.

Before too long, we were inviting individuals and couples to our home for dinner. We were meeting people for coffee and play dates with our kids. God was opening up the floodgates, and we were riding on the wave of His presence in our community.

Sharing our vision for Northpoint became second nature to us, and over the course of six months, we saw God form a launch team out of absolutely nothing.

One day, as a Work and Witness team was doing demolition work on our front lobby, a couple pulled into the parking lot. They walked in and shared that they had been living in town for about a year and had been searching to connect with a church. They were Nazarenes and over the years had been a part of several church plants.

On this particular day, after seeing the Work and Witness team’s van that had the name “Nazarene” on it, they decided to take a chance and stop by to see what was going on. They joined our launch team the next week. Cindy now serves as our office administrator, and Gary is our head usher.

Over the next several months leading up to the launch, we hosted numerous block parties and community events, including Kidsanity, which welcomed 72 children from our community for a four-day summer event. Launch Sunday was a great day for us as over 200 people joined us for worship.

From the very beginning of Northpoint’s journey, we have prayed—and continue to pray—for diversity in our congregation. Praise God, He is answering our prayers! God is shaping the church to reflect our community.

We believe that prayer is still the answer for a broken and hurting world. Prayer is the answer for our churches, and prayer is what is going to take a church that was nonexistent and make it into a place where God's transforming power is at work.

It is important to say that this has been a collective effort of the South Texas District. We are grateful for all the pastors and churches that have been so willing to give of their time, resources, and prayers for our launch.

Our story is far from over, but what an adventure it has been! We praise God for what He is doing. We believe the best is yet to come as we journey through the story being written at Northpoint Community Church of the Nazarene.

South America Region (online only pre-recorded)

Next we are going to hear from Pastor María Alejandrina Santos Albórnoz de Rivera. The story comes to us from the city of Mendoza on the Argentina Cuyo District in the South America Region. This is a testimony of God's healing in her life and her adventure in faith as a church-planting pastor. I am privileged to have ordained Pastor María:

In 1969 María Alejandrina was diagnosed with leukemia and tuberculosis, for which she was hospitalized and received medical attention. Feeling great despair and immersed in family troubles, she decided to end her life. She had never heard the story of salvation, and her hope was set on idolatry and witchcraft.

Consumed with depression, she decided to prepare a poison drink, believing this would be the way to end the problems in her life. However, as timing would have it, at the very moment she was going to drink the poison, her children—Margarita who was seven years old, and Robert, four—let out a scream, causing her to postpone her decision.

The following day while she was contemplating whether to go through with her plan, she decided to turn on the radio to station LV10, where *The Nazarene Hour* was being broadcast. Dr. Honorato Reza was preaching about how the sick are healed, the blind given sight, the deaf made to hear, the paralyzed enabled to jump, and the dead brought back to life. At first she thought he was speaking about witchcraft.

Dr. Honorato extended an invitation to visit the Nazarene church located at 930 Colón Street, San José, or his mission on Chile Street and Murialdo. With much difficulty, María Alejandrina went to the meeting at the mission. She arrived while Missionary Victor Eduardo and a brother at the mission were greeting

guests. She mentioned that she was very sick and wanted to be healed. The pastor looked at her and asked her with determination if she believed God could heal her. Her answer was affirmative.

Upon uttering the prayer of faith, María Alejandrina could not repeat the phrase "Lord Jesus." After a while, with help and encouragement from the pastor, she was finally able to complete the prayer. This is when she felt a zing throughout her body. She wanted to run away, but nevertheless she finished the prayer.

At the conclusion of the meeting, she left, having been healed. When she felt the sickness begin to return to her body, her husband would ask if she wanted to visit the doctor. She refused every time because she had faith that God would take care of her.

After 15 days she felt completely healed, and she was able to go back to her job of picking tomatoes. God had healed her, just as she had heard and believed that He would. Four years later she found out she was pregnant with her third child. They named him Víctor Eduardo to honor the missionary.

After having received Jesus as her personal Lord and Savior, she felt the need to share her message of hope with others. She contacted the Cayo, Postas, Chosco, and Ortega families who lived about 80 kilometers away in the Rivadavia Camps.

From there they went to a place where more than 25 pastors were serving under the same mission that was being led by Pastor Elena Campos. During that time, a church was started in María's house at Rodeo del Medio. As time passed, she opened missions in Cocucci, Flor de Cuyo, Palmira, and Junín, all the while earning a living by selling clothes. She spoke to her customers about the great work God had done in her life.

On 11 September 1998, the Cocucci Church of the Nazarene was established. María Alejandrina would preach to the Cocucci family here. This family had owned lands, and after the sale of their property, the barrio was named after them: Barrio Cocucci. The family was honored that the church bore their name.

This is why María felt compelled to invite them to the dedication of the church. The family was present, and they accepted Jesus as their personal Savior while Superintendent Orestes Barbosa preached. The family went on to make sizeable donations, such as paying for new floors for the church.

At the new location, many labored hard to build a dining hall. This was sponsored by Banco Mundial. The dining hall was open Monday through Friday, and it served milk on Saturdays.

Today María Alejandrina is the senior pastor of the church in Barrio Cocucci. She has the support of her son, Sergio Rivera, who is now the associate pastor. This is where, with the help of the mission, they purchased land, and with the support of family and brothers of the congregation, they built the church. Today it is one of the most beautiful church buildings on the district and has been used for hosting special district events including district assemblies.

María Alejandrina has helped and preached to persons from the government, businessmen and women, neighbors, family members, acquaintances, and strangers. In November 2009 she was ordained by Stan Toler in the Church of the Nazarene on the Cuyo District in Argentina.

María Alejandrina has been and still is a great testament to the power and miraculous works of God. Although she never went to school to learn how to read, God has blessed her with the ability to read, interpret, and explain the Word of God.

Her dedication to the work, her effort to preach sound doctrine, her love for helping others, and her deep love for the Lord have been and remain an inspiration to many brothers, leaders, and pastors.

Africa Region (online only pre-recorded)

It has been an honor to serve as general superintendent in jurisdiction of the Africa Region. As we heard in the previous stories, starting churches entails significant personal sacrifice. Listen now as we learn more about the expansion of the church's mission in Africa:

The South East church development area is located in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the Africa Middle Field, where Reverend Celestin is the leader. Those responsible for the church in this part of Africa came to realize, after analyzing the challenges and problems the church and the community are facing in general and in this particular area, that the following issues are devastating to the community:

- Most of the churches are worshiping in houses.
- The congregations do not have enough means to pay for labor and to finish building churches by themselves.
- Except for Rev. Celestin, no pastor is ordained.
- Only one lady is pastoring a local church.
- The church attendance is low—less than 100 members in all the churches.

What to do?

- The church leaders called a two-day seminar to communicate with the pastors. Working together, Rev. Celestin and pastors of various churches in Lubumbashi came up with a plan to solve some of the problems by implementing the following steps:
    - The church that is building will get 10,000 francs ($11 US) from the others in order to show team unity as one body of Jesus Christ, who is Master of the Church.
    - Every church will make a contribution to a central construction fund, which is $60 per year per church. This money is to be used to buy at least three plots for the purpose of building churches.
    - Buy at least five brick machines. The aim is one brick machine per ecclesiastic zone.
    - Divide the area into five ecclesiastic zones.
    - Combine Nazarene Compassionate Ministries with the evangelism team, in order to achieve a holistic ministry.
    - Use The JESUS Film equipment efficiently while training pastors who will lead the planted churches and while preparing them for ordination. More than 30 are enrolled in the pastors' training program.

    - Organize a monthly pastors' meeting in one local church according to the program at the zone level.

- Promote raising animals and helping send children to school.
- Start making bricks to build the walls of a new church while praying for the iron sheets for the roof.
- Start schools in each community with the participation of local people.

What is the result?

- We bought a plot of 60 hectares in Katwatwa, where we will grow vegetables to be used by local people.
- The district has managed to buy plots for five churches.

- Eight new churches and seven preaching points have been planted.
- Now 12 local churches are making bricks for building the temple.

- Seven are almost done with the building; however four are still struggling to get iron sheets.

- Two local churches are making bricks to build a school.

- Twenty-one students are enrolled in this program of raising animals, which helps them to go to school.
- School fees for five students are being paid through the program of making paper bead necklaces.
- A field of peanuts is being prepared for this coming rainy season. This will generate funds for the district to assist churches in desperate need. These vegetables will be sold in Lubumbashi City to get money that will help in building churches.
- Six child development centers are being run locally.
- The literacy program for adults who did not have an opportunity to go to school is being carried out in five local churches.

Our principle is simple: let us do what we can where we are with what we have to God's glory. Funded or not funded, we will do it since it is God's ministry, and He will make it grow and change the situation for His people and His church for His glory.

Pray with us that these efforts may continue to grow and contribute to what is being done in building the kingdom of the Lord in Africa.

Is God always at work? Indeed He is.

This is a day of His favor, even if we do not always see it up close where we are.

There are more inspiring stories to tell. In order to give greater exposure to church planting, the Board of General Superintendents is posting a longer version of its report on line. The development of local churches in Global Mission regions is a vital part of the missional future.

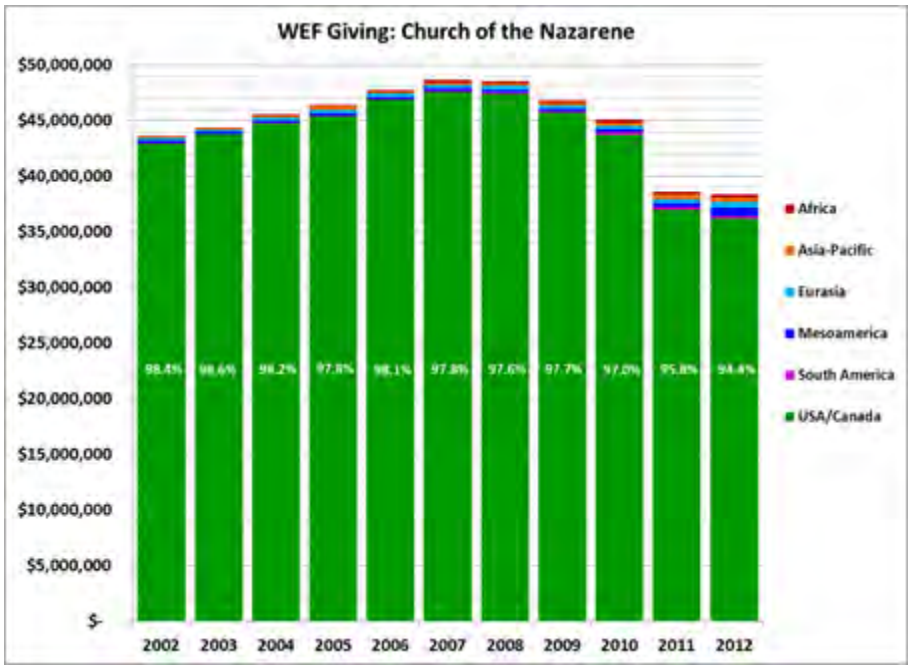
Funding the Mission

Nazarenes were faithful in giving to others in 2012. The financial pressures from the global recession have not gone away; yet our people, with a vision for world evangelization, gave generously and sacrificially to underwrite the mission.

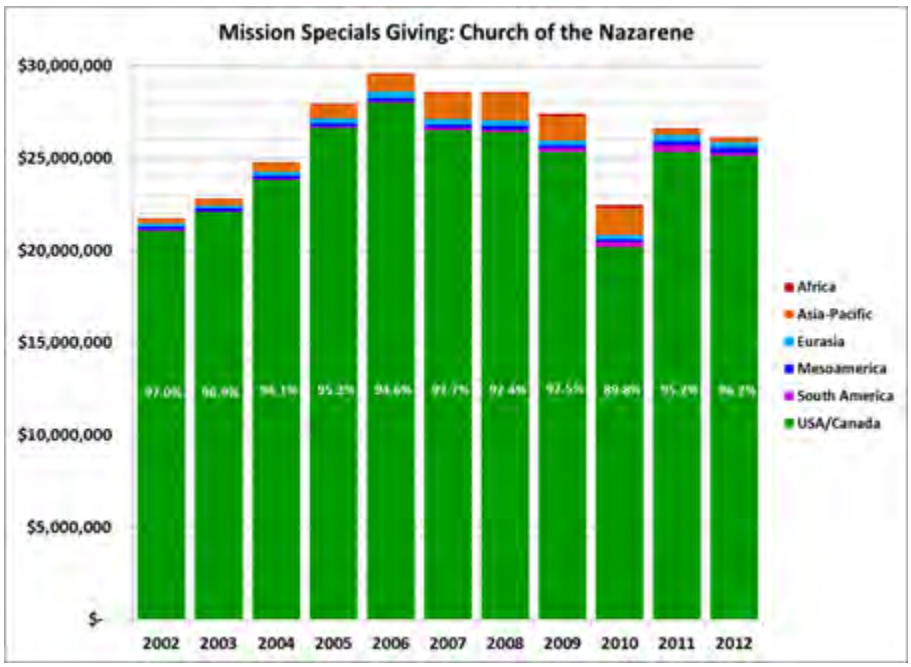
The Board of General Superintendents expresses its gratitude for prayer and financial resources in difficult times.

Reported by our churches through the Office of the General Secretary:

- World Evangelism Fund (WEF) giving stood at $38.3 million—94 percent of which came from the USA/Canada Region.

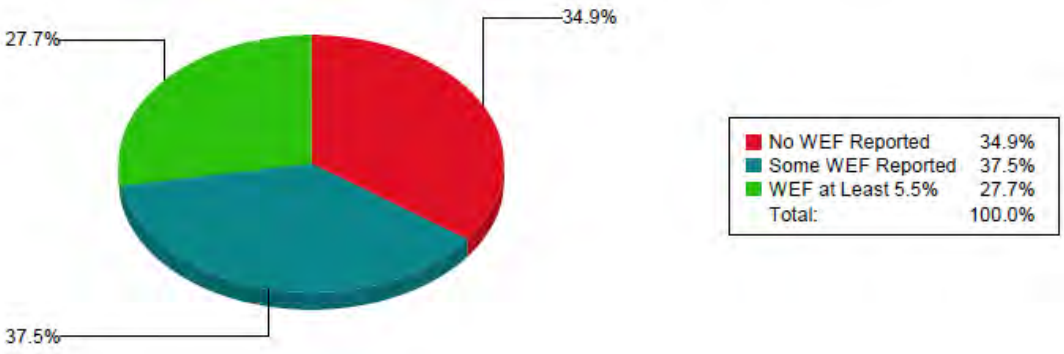


- Mission Specials income was $26.1 million.



- Nearly 28 percent (27.7 percent) of churches gave 5.5 percent or more of non-missions income to WEF.
- An additional 37 percent (37.5 percent) of churches reported some WEF giving.
- Thirty-five percent (34.9 percent) of churches reported no WEF giving.

27.7% of Global Churches of the Nazarene gave 5.5% or more of non-missions giving to World Evangelism.
Based on 18,620 churches reporting financial data this year



Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Missionaries

Ours is a missionary church because God is a missionary God. There were missionaries on the fields from the very beginning of the denomination. It is the church's connectional system of mission and giving that makes it possible to deploy 712 salaried missionaries and contracted volunteers supported by the World Evangelism Fund.

All missionaries, including contracted volunteers, receive support from the WEF system. Some receive salaries. Others, like contracted volunteers, receive support from the systems and structures that are in place because of WEF. Missionaries, volunteers, systems, and structures are all essential to the evangelism strategy of the church worldwide.

On Monday evening of this General Board Session, the church will commission three couples as global missionaries:

- Joshua and Shannon Herndon (Spain)
- Rusty and Dianne Robbins (JESUS Film Harvest Partners)
- Jorge and Ana Betsy Baños (Costa Rica)

God's grace is at work in the world.

God's Grace: Adequate for Our Every Need

And my God will meet all your needs

according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19 (NIV)

So it is that we give testimony of God's faithfulness to the Church of the Nazarene. He has never failed His Church. He will never fail His Church!

Allow me to illustrate this faithfulness on a personal level.

I accepted my first full-time ministerial assignment in 1973. Moving to Tampa, Florida, USA, to become a young church planter with my new bride, Linda, was indeed an exercise in faith! By faith we drove our car from our Ohio college campus to Florida. Eating lots of Hamburger Helper became a way of life! We simply learned to rely on the grace of God to meet our every need.

I remember one occasion when I felt led by the Lord to send $50 to the Carters, missionaries to the American Indians in Arizona, even though I was not sure why I was supposed to do this.

Linda and I examined our checkbook and found just $54 in our account! We sent the $50 anyway.

The next day I went to the post office, and to my surprise, my college roommate, J. Michael Walters, had sent us a letter and enclosed a love gift of $50! This was pretty amazing, considering that he was a student at Asbury Seminary.

Naturally, I hurried home to share the good news with Linda. On the way, I began to sing an old hymn …

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to take Him at His Word;
Just to rest upon His promise,
Just to know, "Thus saith the Lord!"
Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er;
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
O for grace to trust Him more!
Louisa M. R. Stead

(Public Domain)

Obviously, we were satisfied because God had met our need overnight! The Carters wrote back two weeks later and said, "Your check for $50 arrived just on time. We were preparing to cancel a doctor's appointment for our daughter, Angie, because we did not have the money." Would you believe, they needed exactly $50!

Praise the Lord!

This simple story of God's faithfulness is repeated millions of times each day for those who are called according to His purposes.

Our prayer this very moment is that you will find God adequate for your every need. Spiritual. Physical. Financial. Emotional. Relational. Healing. God will meet all your needs "according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus."

God's Grace: Can Be Experienced by Anyone

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)

One of my favorite speakers is Florence Littauer. She and I shared speaking duties at an INJOY Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, sometime ago. As usual, Florence was winning the crowd with her great sense of humor and anecdotes of everyday life. And she spoke about God's grace.

She told one delightful story about a speaking engagement during which she apparently was focusing on the sinfulness of mankind and the need we all have for God's grace. Spontaneously Florence asked, "Does anyone here know what grace means?"

A seven-year-old girl on the front row, all decked out in a white dress, stood up and raised her hand. "I know, Miss Littauer! I know!" she said. "Grace is unmerited favor from God."

Florence could not believe what she had just heard. She then asked the young girl to step up to the platform with her.

"Great answer," Florence said. "Now tell the audience what that means."

The little girl folded her hands and shrugged, "I don't have a clue!"

Our Wesleyan-holiness heritage teaches that God's grace is a wonderful gift, freely offered to humankind. We do not "earn" it. God provides us with:

- Prevenient grace.
- Saving grace.
- Sanctifying grace.

God's prevenient grace is with us from birth, preparing us for new life in Christ. "Prevenient" means "comes before." John Wesley believed that God places a little spark of divine grace within us that enables us to recognize and accept His justifying grace.

When we experience God's saving grace, we come into that new life in Christ. Wesley believed that people are free to accept or reject this justifying grace.

He also believed that after we have accepted God's grace, we are to move on in His sustaining or sanctifying grace. We cannot claim God's salvation and do nothing. We are to participate in what Wesley called "the means of grace" and continue to grow in the Christian life.[3]

One writer put it this way: "We should confidently ask Him for His grace without regard to our thoughts, depending on the infinite merits of our Lord. Every time we ask, God does not fail to give us His grace."[4]

The Church of the Nazarene believes God's grace can be experienced by anyone. It is intended for all. Salvation for all. Holiness for all. Concern for all. Grace for all.

Summary[5]

Perhaps some history will give us a better perspective on our mission and the "times and the seasons" in which we are living.

During the mid-1940s, the church faced a variety of tests—not dissimilar to the present. In spite of increased membership, declining growth rates worried leaders.

In the minds of some, the founders' "passion for souls" was being lost or diluted.

In January 1946 General Superintendent J. B. Chapman, in an urgent address, called for a denomination-wide "Crusade for Souls." A year later Nazarene evangelists met in Kansas City, Missouri, USA, for a Conference on Evangelism that focused on the theme "All Out for Souls." The goal was to awaken the laity and combine technique with the Holy Spirit.

As Nazarene historians write in "Our Watchword and Song," this led to a renewed effort to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and spread scriptural holiness by whatever means possible:

- Revivals
- Radio
- Increased visitation
- Starting churches
  From 1946 to 1956, 1,523 churches were planted in the United States and Canada, and membership grew by 86,000. Sunday School doubled from 369,000 to 611,000, and per capita giving rose from $82 in 1946 to $130 in 1956.

The new energy in evangelism went global, taking root in the Philippines, India, and Africa.

In 1956 Evangelism became a separate department under the leadership of V. H. Lewis.

Like other evangelistic groups, Nazarenes used technology to advance the gospel. In 1945 the church established the Nazarene Radio League with T. W. Willingham as executive director. First there were special broadcasts; and then came Showers of Blessing in 1960, with R. V. DeLong as speaker.

The program was carried on 400 stations around the world.

This forward movement by the Church of the Nazarene came at the end of a great economic recession and the Second World War. It was time for the church to get moving again, which included sending missionaries who had been held back because of those difficult times.

What can we learn from our predecessors, even though we now live in a very different time and place?

- They awakened to their situation, realizing that the spiritual needs inside and outside the church were as great as ever.
- They placed themselves under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and prayer.
- They focused on evangelistic opportunities that they helped create.
- They acted on their beliefs—which means we have to know what we believe and why.
- They took the long view of mission and trusted God for their future—and so should we.

A Great Commission Church

I want to close with a story that should motivate us to be even more of an externally focused church.

I ordained a man last fall whom we will call José Alberto (not his real name). In 1978 he heard a World Mission Radio broadcast sponsored by the Church of the Nazarene and was converted. Radio is still an accessible and affordable technology in many countries.

One day while trying to tune in the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) for world news, José found a station that was teaching about God's love. When he could not find the BBC, he decided to listen to the radio station that was broadcasting the Word of God.

This caught his attention, and for several weeks that followed, he found himself tuning in to listen to God's Word. He later responded to the invitation to give his heart to the Lord. He says that when he accepted Jesus as his Savior he had so much peace and joy.

He wrote to the radio station for guidance and was later introduced to the leaders of the Church of the Nazarene. Discipleship and training for ministry followed.

In a life transformed by the Holy Spirit, Pastor Alberto is a fruitful church planter, having started 20 underground churches in a gospel-resistant area. He has also been imprisoned many times. Although he has been beaten and persecuted for his faith, Brother Alberto still finds God's grace sufficient for his every need.

Pastor Alberto's story—and those of other pastors like him—is one of courage, humility, and grace. It comes about as our denomination is a Great Commission church with a heavenly vision.

What does this story—and others in our report—say to us?

The hope and prayer of each general superintendent—Jerry Porter, Jesse Middendorf, J. K. Warrick, Eugénio Duarte, David Graves, and me—is that over two million Nazarenes will see their lives "as the Lord has assigned each to his task" wherever they are planted …

… that they are obedient to God's voice

… people of prayer

… in the Word

… living life in the Spirit

… passionate for souls

… embracing the radical optimism of grace

Respectfully and prayerfully submitted,
Board of General Superintendents

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Prepared and presented by Stan A. Toler

[1] *Phineas F. Bresee*, Carl Bangs, Beacon Hill Press, 1995 p. 51

[2] Ibid

[3] *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life*, online article

[4] *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Brother Lawrence, translated by Robert J. Edmonson, Paraclete Press, 1985, p. 74

[5] Historical references from, *Our Watchword and Song*, Floyd Cunningham, editor, Stan Ingersol, Harold E. Raser, David P. Whitelaw, pp. 381-388

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