

32

Great Commission – Church of the Nazarene - Africa

Rev Daniel Mokebe

Field Director, Africa Central Field, Harare, Zimbabwe

“A good name is better than a fine perfume...”(Ecclesiastes 7: 1a). Understanding who we are, where we come from and where we are heading is very important in our lives. The name of our denomination is derived from our Lord Jesus Christ. He was born in Bethlehem but grew up in the little town of Nazareth and was called the Nazarene. Our Church founder Dr Phineas Breese prayed seeking the Lord’s guidance and wisdom and God led him to name his Church after His son, the Nazarene. In the early days, our Church was called the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. We know that due to the tongues-speaking issue ‘Pentecost’ was dropped. To differentiate us from the tongues-speaking Pentecostals our forefathers chose the name Church of the Nazarene. Looking into the historical background of the Church of the Nazarene, there have been several mergers with other holiness groups with the same spirit of responding to the Great Commission. When the mergers took place other missionaries from these holiness groups were already in other countries of the world fulfilling the Great Commission.

From the early beginning Dr Breese desired to reach the poor with the message of holiness in response to the Great Commission. The reason for our existence is to touch the lost with the message of God’s love, preaching and living the message of heart holiness.

Our Belief

We believe in the Triune God, the creator God, who reveals himself in three ways: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The Great Commission comes from the heart of God. It was not an afterthought that God selected Mary and Joseph so that Christ might come through them, but it was decided before the creation of the world. “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (Ephesians 1:4); “He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake” (1 Peter 1:20, John 3:16); Jesus said, “...As

the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

What we believe to be the Great Commission is the mandate of Christ before he ascended into heaven: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Rick Warren wrote a book titled *The Purpose Driven Church*. I see that our Church is a purpose-driven church and the purpose that drives us is the Great Commission. One may say that mandate was not for us but was for the apostles. God’s love is inclusive. Christ’s prayer is also inclusive: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message” (John 17:20).

Our Mission Statement as a Denomination

The General Church Mission Statement as well as our Regional Mission Statement keeps us focussed. We are convinced that God has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light that we may be his witnesses. Just as he said to Abram, “I will bless you and make you a great nation and the nations of the world will be blessed through you”, we are saved and sanctified that others may be saved and be sanctified through us. We are blessed to bless others. We have been found to go and find others. We are to emulate our Lord.

We Follow the Footsteps of Our Saviour

Jesus said, “The Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He said “For the Son of Man has not come to be served, but serve and give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). We are Nazarenes following the Nazarene – seeking the lost. Whenever there is preaching about missions anywhere around the world, the scriptures often quoted are Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. We have taken it upon ourselves that God has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. We take this great command of Christ very seriously and we are on target. We also sense a special call upon us not only to preach salvation through Christ the crucified but also to preach and live the message of heart holiness. Oftentimes the Scriptures marked on our Church buildings and pulpits are: “But just as he who called you is holy, be holy in all you do;

for it is written ‘Be holy, because I am holy’” (1 Peter1: 15-16) and “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter2: 9).

Our Church Structures Help Us To Be On Target

The mainframe structure is threefold – Local Church, District Church, and General Church. Within these structures we have sub-structures which we call auxiliaries, i.e. *NMI*, *SSM* and *NYI*. Our practice of coming together annually as local Churches and District Assemblies helps us keep our core values. No one is left working alone like an island. We believe in accountability and responsibility. This is an indication that a great day is coming when everyone of us will give an account before Christ.

Nazarene Missions International

We agree that this department is the driving force for missions in the Church of the Nazarene in Africa and around the world. The late Dr Phillips made a statement in 1969 that has gripped me to this day. That year was his first visit in Africa. He said, “I have been in Africa four times: First, I came by my **imagination**: listening to missionary reports, reading about the work in Africa I came. Second, I came by **my prayers**: prayer knows no distance, and so I came. Third, I gave to missions, so I came **by giving** love offerings. Lastly, here I am **in person** standing on the soil of Africa.” This speech of Dr Phillips opened my mind to better understand our denomination. Our Church gives every member the opportunity to spread the gospel around the world to reach the nations. NMI involves everyone in missions. It is through this department that missionaries are sent around the world; we have a great army of missionary men and women called of God reaching the lost.

I believe we are on target with the new emphasis from our World Mission Director, Dr Louie Bustle, that each Region be a sending region, each District and local church be sending agents. The Church in Africa has not yet fully experienced itself as a sending church. We are in a crawling stage. As I write this paper I am the fruit of this emphasis, living in Harare from South Africa. I am not the only one but have colleagues also sent by our denomination from Africa to other countries of Africa e.g. Rev Jonas Mulate, Rev Wellington Obotte, and Rev Eugénio Duarte. A new day is dawning in Africa. To be a sending church means supporting those whom

we have sent, as a poster of 1999 pointed out. Yes, the church in Africa supports us in prayer but has not taken full responsibility. Truly we are on track.

Sunday School Ministry

Sunday School is not only an arm of the church to reach out to the lost but it is where the Word of God is taught to all age groups. Someone made this observation: "Plant a thought reap an action, plant an action reap a habit, plant a habit reap a character". Sunday School is another place where those won to Christ are disciplined and Christians are taught how to apply the Word of God in their daily living. The only weakness observed in the African Church is that many of the Sunday School teachers are not well trained and therefore this is one of the greatest needs and calls for our immediate attention. We have excellent teaching materials which are coveted by other denominations.

Nazarene Youth International

Our church believes in the value of young people and they are an integral part of the local Church. The key verse of their motto is very powerful: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). In Africa the highest percentage of people living today is children and young people. Recently I read the quotation "Dig where there is gold...unless you just want to do some exercise" (Reader's Digest 1988). In our Church there is an emphasis on children's ministry for the next ten years, and recently a children's ministry coordinator has been appointed under the Lay Mobilization Department for the Africa Region. This is a big step. We want to dig where there is gold.

Evangelism Strategy and Methods

What are some of the methods which help us fulfil the Great Commission in Africa? A church planting a baby church, tent campaigns, and Compassionate Ministry (NCM) which has done a great work in the last two years. Southern Africa has been hit by famine, especially Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe.

Feeding programmes took place in these countries not only for the sake of humanitarian aid but also for touching people with the love of Christ. In one area a Church planted 9 new churches through this programme. Africa also has been hit hard by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Parents die and leave

orphans uncared for. NCM has helped through conducting training sessions for AIDS awareness, training local Churches not only in how to take care of orphans or AIDS affected patients but also how to avoid this deadly disease. In Zambia the Church has taken full responsibility and compassionate ministry has become a lifestyle of our local churches and Christians.

Other methods used to fulfil the Great Commission are JESUS Film Partnerships, personal evangelism, and the training of ministerial students in our institutions. We also try to enter new areas and new countries in every quadrennium (on the Regional level). A weakness observed is a lack of a system that helps us retain more converts in the discipleship class who have been led to Christ through the JESUS Film. I feel that we need a great help in this God called ministry. Nevertheless we are on target.

Needs in the African Church

There is a need for pastoral support. Working in poor economic countries, I have seen that the system of a proper support for ministers is lacking. Local churches, which biblically should be taking responsibility for the support of their ministers, are very poor or are not doing anything at all.

There is a need for called, committed, and sanctified men and women of God, who solely depend on God and believe in his Word.

There is lack of laity, saved and sanctified, who understand the heartbeat of God and the mission of the Church.

What would the solutions of the above needs be? It will take a Holy Spirit revival in every local church and district and creative thinking and hard work.

Facts Can Tell It Better

In Africa our membership on the Region from 1987 doubled in five years from 37,000 to over 100,000 members. To date we are over 250,000 members. We have a goal to reach 1 million new Nazarenes by 2010. We cling to his promise "...surely I will be with you until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Without him we can do nothing.

Bibliography

1. Dr Phillips World Mission Director Speech – 1969
2. Habits for Discipleship –
3. *Readers Digest* –1988
4. Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan
5. *Manual - Church of the Nazarene-Auxiliaries* By laws
6. Scriptures from the New International Version (NIV)