

STATISTICAL REALITY OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE WITHIN THE EVANGELICAL POPULATION IN IBERO-AMERICA (II)

By Accel Ruiz

Country of Origin: Mexico

Serving in: United States

THE GREAT COMMISSION

The first Church of the Nazarene at 317 S. Main Street, Los Angeles, California, was organized with 82 members. In its first year of existence it had grown to 350 members. This information is taken from Dr. Mendell Taylor, professor History of the Church of the Nazarene at the Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri.

From the first days of the Church of the Nazarene, the church had a clear vision of the Great Commission. Dr. P.F. Bresee wrote the following in the *Nazarene Messenger* on August 1904, "The Church of the Nazarene tries to enter every door that providentially opens for us, and by the grace of God preach the whole, complete, perfect and always present salvation from all sin, and Jesus' manifested presence in the midst of his people. We welcome all that want to join the battle, and we will fight the battle until Christ returns or we are called to go to heaven."

When the Church of the Nazarene was organized in 1907 in Pilot Point, Texas, the church reported 6,198 members and 175 ordained ministers. One can affirm that the 20th century was a century of growth, which cannot be said of the first years of the current century as in the past ten years the church has experienced loss and stagnation. We can review some recent figures:

Total membership in 2002	1,466,920	
Total membership in 2003	1,435,780	
Loss	-31,140	or -2.12%

United States

Total membership in 2002	643,649	
Total membership in 2003	621,048	
Loss	-22,601	or -3.51%

Canada

Total membership in 2002	12,673	
Total membership in 2003	12,624	
Loss	-49	or -0.30%

World Areas

Total membership in 2002	810,598	
Total membership in 2003	802,108	
Loss	-8,490	or -1.05%

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The greatest loss has been in the United States. This loss of membership is worrying and could be the general affirmation that the church is at a standstill regarding its growth. In no way can we say that we have lost the passion and the fire for the Great Commission that Jesus gave us. Local, district, regional and world efforts to fulfill the Great Commission are real. A fact that shows that we are getting ahead with this effort is that there were 111,526 new Nazarenes in 2002 and in 2003 there were 117,296. In 2002, 96,313 were gained by profession of faith and in 2003, there were 100,469. Here, the rule that says that “greater the number of members, greater the gain”, doesn’t hold up, because the gain is minimal.

During the 1997 General Assembly, the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and in Canada implemented a strategy of declaring the United States and Canada mission fields. The Board of General Superintendents put forth a challenge to the church in those countries: “under God’s direction, the Board of General Superintendents is encouraging every congregation, district, educational institution and the General Offices to become actively involved in the spiritual revolution in the United States and Canada. This revolutionary challenge is that every Nazarene church becomes a mission station; every Nazarene pastor becomes a missionary and every community a mission field. This call is so we can center our efforts on the New Testament priorities of gaining the lost for the Lord and then developing the new converts in disciples in the image of Christ.”

In the quadrennial address in June 2001, the Board of General Superintendents put forth a challenge to all Nazarenes throughout the world to work together so that for the Centennial Celebration of the denomination we would have: 2 million members, 2 million in attendance in a weekly worship service, 1 million attending Sunday School and 18,000 churches.

THE GROWTH OF MINORITIES IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The Church of the Nazarene in the United States encouraged the concept “inclusive”, and also there has been the intent of “internationalization of the church”. The inclusion of other races and languages in the directive organization, such as the General Board of the church and other efforts led by the idea of “inclusiveness” in the church. A fact that should accelerate this idea of “inclusiveness” is what happened in the 2001 General Assembly where the biggest delegation was from outside of the United States. Not only due to this idea of inclusiveness, but for the growth in the number of members as one can observe from the previous statistics.

The 2000 United States Census reflects various positive discoveries that help us to have a better understanding of the current reality in the Hispanic Church of the Nazarene.

<i>United States</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>
White population.....	75.0%	69.1%
Black population	12.1%	12.1%
Hispanic population	9.3%	12.5%

The total number of Hispanics reported in the same Census was 30 million. It is estimated that by 2010 there could be 50 million Hispanics in the USA.

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The same 2000 Census show us other information: in 21 states of the United States, Latinos are the largest minority group. In what way has this growth impacted the Church of the Nazarene in the United States?

In view of the loss of membership by the dominant church, the largest minority group in the United States—the Hispanics—have experimented modest growth, but not sufficient to make up the deficit in membership. In the following, I will present some revealing facts about growth in the Hispanic churches in the United States and Canada during the past ten year.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Congregations</i>	<i>New Nazarenes</i>
1990.....	8,163.....	168.....	921
2000.....	14, 322.....	283.....	2,074

In only ten years we have grown 75%.

One of the characteristics, among others, is that Hispanic churches in the United States and in Canada are small in number. Less than 60 churches have 197 members and around 200 churches have a membership of between 11 and 13.

Given the immigration pattern of persons who in their countries of origin were Christians in some type of denomination, many of them are attracted to Hispanic churches in the United States and Canada, so the growth of new believers is minimal.

What is happening to the passion for the Great Commission?

FOR A HEALTHY CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

Payne, in his book, *Reclaiming the Great Commission*, says that the most important Protestant churches are in crisis. Denominational statistics show that history is irrevocable: there is a loss in membership and an increase in rejection by non-believers. Payne also says that instead of talking about the symptoms such as a loss of membership, one should talk about the root or cause of these symptoms. One of the metaphors used to describe the current situation of churches in decline is “illness”. This metaphor can help understand the causes of the crisis and to develop possible treatments to reestablish its vitality. The “illness” that is affecting many churches is a loss of common vision of being a missionary church committed to the community, discipleship and personal transformation. The loss of a common vision is what creates multiple symptoms.

David F. Well, in his book, *No Place for Truth*, says: “...while the traditional elements of the Christian faith apparently survive to modernity, American life, however, is redefined by modernity in such a way that the United States evidently is no longer a Christian country and it does not matter how liberally the word ‘Christian’ is used”.

A few days ago I heard a phrase from someone very important in the Church of the Nazarene: “grow or die”, a phrase in relation to the growth of the church. With this I would like to finish this paper proposing the following:

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1. Review the viability of our principles as a church, (a) that every member be a missionary; (b) that every local church be a mission station; (c) that every nation be a mission field. Of course, the principles need to be universally applicable in the church, but their contextualization and articulation involves a series of aspects such as: organization, culturalization, methodology, strategies, etc., in which every country and every Nazarene can participate to make viable and clear said principles.
2. Review the health of our church. Does Payne's finding apply to our church, that the church is "sick"? The Church of the Nazarene continues to sustain that we are Christians because the only way of salvation is through Christ. We are and always have been a Christian denomination according to Dr. Paul G. Cunningham, General Superintendent of the church. We affirm that we are a holiness church; that in born in a relationship with Christ that is cultivated and grows by procuring the mind of Christ. We are a missional church. This core value is governed by the Great Commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). The mission declaration of the church is: "The mission of the Church of the Nazarene consists of responding to the Great Commission to 'go and make disciples of all nations'". We feel that our mission is to reach the entire world with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ and with the distinctive message of entire sanctification and Christian holiness.

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