

THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE'S GLOBAL THEOLOGY CONFERENCE (GTC)
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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The gathering of church leaders for theological conference possesses a rich history. Acts chapter 15 provides the story of Paul and Barnabas conferencing together with James and the apostles on theological matters critical to the mission of the church. The first 800 years of the Church of Jesus Christ offers similar testimony as pastoral theologians and church leaders gathered in no less than seven conferences (councils) to work out confessions of faith rooted in Scripture and the Spirit-empowered life of the church.

This impulse to gather in conference continues to mark the life of the contemporary Church of Jesus Christ. Theological conference for the sake of the Church entails more than academic exercise. The idea of global theological conference among Nazarenes leans significantly into the familial connections that we enjoy. The past four Global Theology Conferences clearly gives service to the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit, who is always working to gather us as the unified body of Christ. These efforts also underscore the mission of the church, gathering, but also sending us into the world, bearing witness to the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord Jesus Christ.

The ongoing need for theological conference addresses more than the content of the faith. Conferencing significantly gathers the collegium of pastoral theologians and academic theologians; coming together as teachers, pastors, superintendents, and other ministers (clergy and lay) that give their lives in service to the gospel. The grace of Christian conferencing, rightly understood, serves as an “outcome” of itself that moves participants into the practice of ministry and then back to reflection, demonstrating a constant, Spirit-inspired, motion of prayer and mission.

Researchers often note that John Wesley thought of Conference as one of the means of grace. Wesley actually used the phrase only once, but Randy Maddox suggests that “the class meeting is the best example of what he has in mind. This is particularly the case if we assume his primary focus in ‘means of grace’ is sanctification.”¹ Kevin Watson asserts that Wesley would have believed “Christian Conference was honest, direct, piercing conversation with other Christians that was intended to help the participants grow in holiness.”² These notes prove instructive to the Church of the Nazarene as we consider the purpose of gathering for theological conference.

Mark Quanstrom notes, in *A Century of Holiness*, that the “question in the last decades of the 20th century was whether or not the Church of the Nazarene had a coherent and cogent doctrine of

¹ Kevin Watson quoting Randy Maddox in “Christian Conferencing As A Means Of Grace,” *Seedbed* (November 6, 2014) available online (accessed 8/10/2023) at <https://www.seedbed.com/kevin-watson-christian-conferencing-means-grace/>

² Kevin Watson, “Holy Conferencing: What Did Wesley Mean? (Part 2),” Kevin M. Watson Blog (July 18, 2013) available online (accessed 8/10/2023) at <https://kevinmwatson.com/2013/07/18/holy-conferencing-what-did-wesley-mean-part-2/>

holiness at all.”³ The ability to arrive at “coherent and cogent” theological expression does not entail finding the right person to nail down the articulation in a definitive publication. The nature of theology is dialogical, relational, and most of all prayerful. As Kent Brower and David McEwan noted as early as their 2007 paper, “Future Challenges in Wesleyan Theological Education,” the only way for Wesleyan theology to be “preserved and enhanced” involves “a context of dialogue in which the confessional academy is seen as part of the *ecclesia* of God.”⁴ This dialogue must be viewed in a global perspective. Coherence can only be attained when the different contexts are taken into consideration.

This understanding remains central to the purpose of theological conference. Persons gather not exclusively for the purpose of debate, argument, or apologetic. Participants gather also for the purpose of worship, prayer, and for “the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) and for mission. Consequently, and particularly for the Church of the Nazarene, conferencing must be global and inclusive. A key component of the conference entails the opportunity to develop relationships with brothers and sisters from around the world. The relationships provide not only friendship but also understanding through the intentional expression of contextual theologies that can shape an authentic global perspective toward theological inquiry.

These principles, expressed through the planned gathering of Nazarenes from around the world into worship, prayer, and the authentic exchange of ideas, give meaning and purpose to a Global Theology Conference for the Church of the Nazarene.

Drafted September 3, 2020 by Klaus Arnold, Jeren Rowell, and Dean Blevins

³ Mark Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene, 1905 to 2004* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2004), p. 169.

⁴ Kent Brower and David McEwan, “Future Challenges in Wesleyan Theological Education,” *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 7:1 (April 2007) available online (accessed 8/10/2023) at <http://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-6-2/7-gtiie-brower-mcewan/file>