

MORE THAN THE SUM: ECCLESIOLOGY AND *MISSIO ECCLESIA* IN THE WORLD
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Introduction

It can be tempting to describe the global Church of the Nazarene by adding up all the churches, members, worship attenders, countries, or world areas. Approximately 30,000 churches, 2.5 million members, and 165 world areas are some impressive statistics that reveal the scope and span of the Nazarene ecclesial footprint worldwide. Yet hidden within these numbers are local pastors and committed Christians serving Jesus and bringing the Good News of God's reign to the most remote places of the earth, while living sacrificially. Nazarene statistics count congregations in the world's largest cities, but also the smallest, unincorporated communities. Some congregations minister in flood plains, in shantytowns, in garbage dumps, in high mountains and low deserts, or on remote islands. There truly is no limit to where Nazarene congregations sprout up—a testament to the commitment and creativity of so many ministers and faithful Nazarenes globally.

This paper will consider how Nazarene ecclesial mission points toward God's mission, and therefore what it means for Nazarene ecclesiology to be “more than the sum of her parts.” Statistics can be one of the quickest and simplest ways to express who we are as one of the few Christian unified, global denominations.¹ But an overreliance on numbers leaves Nazarene ecclesiology and ecclesial mission truncated. Since its inception, the Church of the Nazarene has grown and spread into some of the most remote areas of the world because our pastors, leaders, and missionaries are dedicated to the Great Commission, tethered with the call to live out a life of holiness. Through serving in Nazarene Compassionate Ministries International for more than twenty years, I have been given a beautiful vantage point to witness where and how Nazarene congregations serve through unique Wesleyan-holiness commitments to love and mercy alongside many people living in extreme poverty and on the margins of society.

In this paper, I will analyze the unique contributions of our Nazarene ecclesiology and *missio ecclesia* through which we bear witness to the *missio Dei*. Before turning to what can be a rich ecclesial mission and further unpacking of Nazarene ecclesiology,² it is important to recognize how ecclesiology can become subsumed under a functional ecclesiology that lends itself toward a measurable mission strategy. Therefore, my ecclesiological contribution will center specifically on the mission detailed in the second half of Article XI on “The Church” in the Nazarene *Manual*. Undergirding my examination and exploration is the understanding that missiology does not precede but flows out of ecclesial identity and mission lived out in the world. More generally speaking, the church contributes to God's mission as she becomes a

¹ The Church of the Nazarene intentionally remains a single, interconnected church rather than federated into national churches as per commitments to internationalization and a unified structure in the 1980 General Assembly.

² See Deirdre Brower-Latz, “What is the Church? Toward a Wesleyan Ecclesiology,” *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 6, No. 2 (January 2007): <https://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-6-2/6-gtiie-brower-latz/file>. Presented at the Nazarene Global Theology Conference, 2007.

people formed to reflect God’s hope and restoration seen throughout Scripture through God’s presence, relationship, and acts of love for all nations. The first section explores a Nazarene propensity toward numerical measurement, which in turn shapes ecclesiology and missiology toward particular ends. Subsequently, the second half of the paper will focus on how Nazarene ecclesiology—in the sense of “the life of the church”—must recover the practices and habits of our distinctive Wesleyan-holiness ecclesial mission. I hope to show how the church may resist and grow beyond a functional ecclesiology when it centers on the commitments and practices reflective of who Nazarenes are called to be as the Body of Christ through the missional impulse to live out holiness of heart and life.

Ecclesiology and the Problem with Our Measurement Tools

While *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesia* are distinct from missiology or mission strategy, examining the ecclesiological foundation for Nazarene congregations is central to how the church will continue to live into her ecclesial mission as a global denomination. Through global expansion over time—and in some countries, the exponential growth of Nazarene churches and membership—mission strategy has unduly influenced the development of Nazarene ecclesiology and ecclesial mission. Not alone in this challenge, many Protestant and Catholic ministries alike have relied on numerical or quantitative forms of measurement in evangelism, discipleship-making, and church planting of varying degrees since their inception. Linear and Westernized cultural frames have shaped many Christians to be short-sighted toward our view of the church’s holistic mission in the world.

Defining the Church in Metrics: The 1970s Lausanne movement sought to understand the church’s role in worldwide evangelization. At that time, Argentinian theologian C. René Padilla cautioned against reducing the Great Commission to numerical calculation. For many Christian mission agencies, parachurch ministries, and denominations, it is all too true that:

The strategy for the evangelization of the world thus becomes a question of mathematical calculation. The problem is to produce the greatest number of Christians at the least possible cost in the shortest possible time, and for this the strategists can depend on the work of the computer.³

While the urgency for bringing people to Christ certainly is the motivation behind these methods and approaches, this approach has also become a goal in Nazarene ecclesiology. Writing in 1975, Padilla notes that such numerical goals can be secured through the work of calculations and computers.

Perhaps the short-sightedness of a single, numerical approach seems glaringly apparent some 50 years later. Leaders might think strategies for evangelization of the world are accessible to a person working on a computer, or that our evangelization efforts are potentially solvable by Artificial Intelligence (Chat GPT). Regardless, the Lausanne movement and similar techniques for looking at “evangelization” across the globe influence Nazarene mission strategy and

³ C. René Padilla, “Evangelism and the World,” in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 126.

development as a denomination. Over time, a propensity for quantitative measurement—which has also simultaneously led to further ministry compartmentalization—built practices that shape a functional rather than robust ecclesiology.

An over-reliance on one tool of measurement—and much less, quantitative methods—falls woefully short and truncates the holistic development and deepening faithfulness of the ecclesial body. In fact, the community development dictum “you are what you measure” has become a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁴ In other words, when a denomination records and measures numerical dimensions of the church, its goals and measurements of success become numbers-driven and further emphasize institutional functions and activities that lend themselves to neat calculations. Another way of recognizing this common phenomenon is through the adage “form equals content,” which points to how the “means” for arriving at a goal also direct the goal itself.⁵ Both statements remind the church to zoom out to see the larger message that may be broadcast to others. When the church is over-reliant on one method or form, what additional aspects and priorities become stifled?

The Church as an Alternative View: In contrast to solving this equation of population and evangelization, something entirely different is happening in God’s gathering of the church to participate in the *missio Dei* to redeem the world. The signs are found not in numbers, but in robust forms of life where two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name. In embracing the broader Christian theology of the church, the Church of the Nazarene functions through *kerygma* (proclamation), *liturgies* (worship), *koinonia* (fellowship), *didache* (teaching), and *diakonia* (service). The church’s gathering in worship is a key focal point for why they gather—to worship our God and, therefore, embrace their identity as God’s people and followers of Jesus.⁶ It is precisely in the acts of worship and through teaching/learning, service, proclamation, and fellowship that Christians come to know God more deeply and are transformed to live into God’s plans for the world. Together, all these practices comprise a holistic picture of what it means to be the church.

That said, the activities resist conformity to a pattern, formula, or rule book to follow. Instead, the holistic picture of what it means to be the church reflects more the task of learning a language by immersing oneself in the surrounding culture. Activities, expressions, practices, and commitments give meaning to what Christians are doing when they gather as the Body of Christ,

⁴ “You are what you measure” is a common adage in the Christian community development and parachurch ministry sectors. For example, see the Barna Group’s article “Measuring Ministry Success: What Rethinking Mountains Can Teach the Church,” by Joe Jenson, accessed November 25, 2025: <https://www.barna.com/research/measuring-ministry-success/>. See also the Billy Graham Center of Wheaton College article “What Should We Be Measuring in Ministry,” by Jessie Cruickshank, accessed November 25, 2025: <https://wheatonbillygraham.com/what-should-we-be-measuring-in-ministry/>.

⁵ See Catherine Bell in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) regarding “form equals content.” See Neil B. Wiseman, *Leadership: A leadership Development Strategy for Church Growth* (Kansas City, MO: Foundry Publishing, 1979).

⁶ Of course, these functions of the church also follow suit with Article XI: “God calls the Church to express its life in the unity and fellowship of the Spirit; in worship through the preaching of the Word, observance of the sacraments, and ministry in His name; by obedience to Christ, holy living, and mutual accountability” in Church of the Nazarene, *Manual 2023* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2023).

forming a way of life learned uniquely in the church—as a people called to follow God. Naturally, the process of learning is dynamic as it is embodied and enacted amid contextual challenges.

The church, as a living organism, finds herself called to be continually reforming (*ecclesia semper reformanda est*). The church is continually reforming (being reformed) because it is reflective of the depth of a Trinitarian God: the church as the people of God (Father), the church as the Body of Christ, and the church as the community of the Spirit. Therefore, while the church relies on God for its being, the church is not static. It is living, moving, pliable, and adaptable. We are God’s people, God’s creation, wholly dependent on God as we choose the life God offers us in Jesus. Thus, ecclesiology ultimately contains a question of identity, and it is by living into this identity that the church also lives into her mission and participation in God’s mission for the world. The church as the Body of Christ cannot be easily co-opted by other political, social, or cultural agendas, though many elements of ecclesial expression may be. This is so because the church reflects the “already/not yet” inauguration of God’s reign as it embraces its existence as a peculiar people who follow Jesus, embodying the scandal of the cross and the hope of the new creation.⁷

Wesleyan-Holiness Identity

For Nazarenes examining ecclesiology from within the “small c” church and her contribution in God’s world, it is important to recover the particular Nazarene expressions of faithfulness by first recognizing two ways the church happens. First, as the *church gathered*, the body worships and offers opportunities for teaching and fellowship. The ecclesial focus in these spaces and times points to trust and dependency on God and the nurturing of believers. Second, the body also manifests itself in the *church dispersed*. To note that the church is scattered recognizes the geographical expanse of the church, but also specifically, the intentional sending of the church into the world. The church is not sent out aimlessly, but intentionally to participate in the *missio Dei* in the world. At the close of gathering in worship, the body receives the benediction to go out into the world to love and serve it in the name of Christ. The church is sent out, offering further opportunities for proclamation, service, and fellowship among new people and contexts.

As the church engages in such acts of faithfulness, Christians encounter neighbors and strangers, including those who may not know God and those who may be in need. The church gathered and dispersed are two forms in which the church lives out its identity and allegiance to the Lordship of Christ. Ultimately, Christian actions and expressions, both individually and in community, should show that they belong to God, and they follow God’s mission in and for the world. The church is the body that God uses, through Jesus, to change the world.

Similarly, for Wesleyan-holiness people, such as the Church of the Nazarene, God’s calling to be a holy people occurs personally and communally through the church as we seek to live into God’s *imago Dei*. Ron Benefiel sums it up nicely: “Who we are in our essential character and what we do as we engage the world around us bears witness to the world about

⁷ See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

who God is and what God is about.”⁸ As Christians join in the life of Nazarene congregations, the disciples’ character is formed, encouraged, stretched, and held accountable. Seeking to inspire renewal, John Wesley—founder of the Methodist movement—sought to build the holy character and practice of a Christian through small groups (*ecclesiolae*) within the larger *ecclesia* of the Church of England. Thus, smaller expressions of the church ignited spiritual renewal as the Methodist movement offered salvation and Christian formation into the life of holiness, particularly among the working poor of seventeenth-century England. Following its Wesleyan heritage and coming out of the Methodist renewal movement, the Church of the Nazarene continues to shape character and lives of holiness through its many forms and practices that are “means of grace.” The point here is not the forms themselves, but how they gather and shape the Methodist people in the gospel call to be holy in ways that point to God.⁹

Nazarene Missio Ecclesia through Practices of Renewal

These unique Wesleyan-holiness contributions are living expressions of renewal in partnership with the church at large. Perhaps in the same spirit of renewal, early Nazarenes also leaned on particular practices to continue to stretch believers toward a life of holiness amidst contextual challenges, both in society and within the church. Denominational beginnings reveal Nazarene identity and practices oriented toward scriptural holiness, which also offer a distinct contribution towards how the Church of the Nazarene lives out its mission in the world. What began as an ecclesial renewal movement has now grown into a denomination, and therefore, it is always timely to consider the nature of the church and her mission in the world.

Nazarene heritage integrates seeking piety and justice in Christian formation, thus shaping disciples to love God and love neighbor in ever-deepening ways. To further explore *missio ecclesia*, I draw directly from Article XI:

The mission of the Church in the world is to share in the redemptive and reconciling ministry of Christ in the power of the Spirit. The Church fulfills its mission by making disciples through evangelism, education, showing compassion, working for justice, and bearing witness to the kingdom of God.¹⁰

To unpack how the Nazarene mission relates to God’s redemptive and reconciling mission, it is critical to keep in mind how certain tools to measure growth have shaped Nazarene ecclesiology and missiology. By contrast, the tasks of the church in living out its mission shared in the above statement uniquely draw the church toward ongoing renewal and ever-deepening Christian faithfulness to God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the church is continually shaped

⁸ Ron Benefiel, “Christian Holiness and the Wesleyan Mission of Mercy: The Character of the People of God in the World,” 6. Presented on January 10, 2005, at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California.

⁹ Henry W. Spaulding II, “How to Shew the Fly Out of the Fly Bottle: A Reconstruction of the Wesleyan Understanding of Christian Perfection,” in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, (Vol. 33 No. 2 Fall 1998): 166-171, https://wesley.nnu.edu/fileadmin/imported_site/wesleyjournal/1985-wtj-20-1.pdf.

This article republished by Henry W. Spaulding II, and Hank W. Spaulding III, in *Rhythms of Grace: A Broad Vision for Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Cascade Publishers, Portland OR, 2026).

¹⁰ Church of the Nazarene, “Article XI” in *Manual 2023* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2023).

into the Body of Christ as all the activities together are integrated into the life of the church. Nonetheless, within the above frame, Nazarenes have work to do in drawing these activities out of tidy ministry compartments so they may holistically infuse the whole life of the church. Given the space allocated, I will focus the second half of the paper on how the Church of the Nazarene uniquely bears witness to God's reign by living out her *missio ecclesia* among the poor and marginalized. Though not the only example, Nazarene ecclesial practices and commitments lived out on the margins beautifully illustrate how the church enacts its mission in the world.

Another important aspect of Protestant self-critique and reform coming out of the Lausanne movement arrived from the Wheaton consultation on the "Church in Response to Human Need."¹¹ In 1983, several hundred leaders spanning 60 countries gathered to consider how compassion is linked with working for justice, inviting a more holistic frame for ecclesial mission. "The task of the church," noted the consultation, "is not merely picking up survivors from a shipwreck in a hostile sea." The consultation recognized the task of the church to extend the compassion of Jesus when confronted with human need and suffering in the world, yet it also challenged the church to press further into being an agent of God's transformation. The task is more than compassion alone because the church must recognize its role in standing against injustice as well. When working within the "hostile sea" of the world, the church either challenges "evil structures" or supports them.¹² The church cannot remain neutral when faced with injustice because she is called to bear witness to God's reign. Therefore, acts of compassion are linked with fighting injustice and building an alternative future in the name of Jesus. In such fashion, compassion and working for justice also offer new hope. Most importantly, however, all the tasks of the church become guided by the missional pull of "bearing witness to the kingdom of God"—which is Good News for the world!

The reason why the church is called to go to the margins and engage in this work is not that Christians have a moral obligation to be a people of justice or extend compassion throughout the world. To focus on these two tasks would be to stop short of the goal. Christians minister in difficult places in the world because the church is uniquely called to live out God's plans for hope and restoration where they reside. In other words, Christians do these acts not because they are particularly good at them, but because Christians intend to bear witness to God's reign by pointing to God's Good News breaking into the world.

God's Plans are Radically Different: To bear witness to God's plans, the church as *ecclesia* signifies being gathered into a people who are uniquely directed to God and by God. Precisely as Christians bear witness to God, understanding is further opened to how God's reign and the church manifest themselves quite differently than the kingdoms and nations of the world. Additionally, the people of God are also shaped specifically as the Body of Christ, and not a mission agency, a non-profit organization, a parachurch ministry, or a ministry department.

¹¹ The same consultation developed eight principles to reflect the biblical vision of the kingdom of God as "the goal of transformation: 1. Christian social involvement; 2. not only development but transformation; 3. the stewardship of creation; 4. culture and transformation; 5. social justice and mercy; 6. the local church and transformation; 7. Christian aid agencies and transformation; 8. the coming of the kingdom and the church's mission" (C. René Padilla, *Mission between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Cumbria, CA: Langham Global Library, 2010), 14.

¹² Padilla, "Evangelism and the World," 126.

Padilla's caution to the Lausanne participants serves as an important reminder of how the church is different:

The picture of the Church that one derives from the New Testament is certainly not that of a powerful organization that has achieved success in its conquest of the world by the mastery use of human devices and techniques. It is rather the picture of a community experiencing a new (supernatural) reality—the Kingdom of God—to which “the Lord called day by day those who were being saved.”¹³

The forming of the church is the Lord's work. Though it takes place in human forms and understanding, God's calling is toward the creation of a new heavens and a new earth that works on earth even as it is entirely more than this reality. Therefore, as a church body comes together, she also learns to interpret the Lord's work differently and live it differently through distinct practices and life in community.

When the church engaged in activities and signs that bear witness to God's reign, “picking up survivors from a hostile sea” is only the beginning of the story. Christians rescue survivors, walk with them, and help begin their healing toward “new life” directed to Jesus. The church's healing and restoration extend outwardly so the surrounding community may also flourish in new ways, and *together*, the church is united toward a new destination. Mark Griffin and Theron Walker paint the church as both “an inn for weary travelers of the borderlands/frontiers, and an *outpost of hope* for exiles bound for the city of God.”¹⁴ The juxtaposition of these images illustrates the dynamic ministry of the church gathered and sent out. First, the church brings care and love to persons living in contested spaces of the margin in the world. Second—transcending earthly space and time—the church bears witness to something more: the hope Christians have in the destination of life with God. Truly embracing an “already/not yet” dynamic of the heavenly kingdom is the mystery of life in God. Christians are equipped to do this work because they believe in a God who unswervingly loves and walks with them, illuminating the way to deeper faithfulness. How then do Wesleyan-holiness practices and commitments guide the Church of the Nazarene to be a gift of hope to the world by pointing to God's reign?

Holiness of Heart and Life

The distinct ecclesial mission of the Church of the Nazarene is born out of the expressions of holiness of heart and life in the body. As Nazarenes seek to embrace God's vision of salvation and restoration of the world, they live out their calling through works of piety and works of mercy. In bearing witness to God's in-breaking reign, a Nazarene hermeneutic for ecclesial mission can be found in “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6).¹⁵ Such active

¹³ Padilla, “Evangelism and the World,” 139.

¹⁴ Mark Griffin and Theron Walker, *Living on the Borders: What the Church Can Learn from Ethnic Immigrant Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 182.

¹⁵ Galatians 5:6 is not intended to be a new contribution, but rather it signals to how and why the church lives out Christian Perfection, which John Wesley illustrated through the Biblical language of “purity of intention; having the mind of Christ; and loving God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves” (Spaulding, *Ibid.*, 163).

language draws Nazarene believers inwardly toward dependency on the God of love and outwardly toward serving others through the overflow of faith and love.

After all, a Wesleyan-holiness missional frame extends from believers who serve a God who always welcomes human participation in the *missio Dei*. Albert Outler’s description of human participation in divine grace appears fitting for this moment: “It was in the sense of ‘participation’ in the divine life that Wesley had already understood the mysteries of grace and free will, of prevenient grace as the Holy Spirit’s constant initiative, of ‘perfection’ as a process rather than a completed act.”¹⁶ The central component to human participation in the divine life is love—gratuitous love given by God and human response to this love. Thus, the purpose for identifying a hermeneutic is not to support a specific organizational system or a formula to apply to contemporary circumstances. Instead, Wesley’s emphasis more naturally seeks to further holiness of heart and life both as Christians are gathered and as they are sent out to share God’s love with the world.

Mildred Bangs Wynkoop no doubt shares in this theological emphasis, as she writes:

The summarizing word—Wesley’s ultimate hermeneutic—is *love*. Every strand of his thought, the warm heart of every doctrine, the passion of every sermon, the test of every claim to Christian grace, was love. So central is love that to be “Wesleyan” is to be committed to a theology of love.¹⁷

To be committed to a Wesleyan-holiness theology of love means that the church’s practices and activities are born out of “faith working through love.” They are evidenced in the life of the church and its ecclesial mission, which naturally enacts a new way of living amid challenge, oppression, and marginalization. Nazarene history and practices reveal a body of believers committed to love through active participation and embodied faithfulness, especially among the poor and marginalized.

Nazarene Heritage: A Founding Expression

Historians have commonly identified the founding of a church for the poor in the city of Los Angeles in 1895 as the beginning of the Church of the Nazarene. Following John Wesley and his teaching on Christian perfection and holiness, the early developments of the Church of the Nazarene centered on Christian holiness, from which flowed preaching the gospel to the poor and discipleship in Christ. Therefore, the church was organized with the shared purpose of the salvation of souls and giving relief to those in need.¹⁸ The early Articles of Faith and General Rules of Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene began,

¹⁶ Albert C. Outler, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral—in John Wesley,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, No. 1 (Spring, 1985), https://wesley.nnu.edu/fileadmin/imported_site/wesleyjournal/1985-wtj-20-1.pdf.

¹⁷ Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1972), 101.

¹⁸ Stan Ingersol, ed., *Rescue the Perishing, Care for the Dying: Sources and Documents on Compassionate Ministry in the Nazarene Archives.* 2nd Edition. Church of the Nazarene Archives, see pp. 1-3.

We seek the simplicity and the power of the primitive New Testament church. The field of labor to which we feel called is in the neglected quarters of the cities and wherever else may be found waste places and souls seeking pardon and cleansing from sin. This work we aim to do through the agency of city missions, evangelistic services, house-to-house visitation, caring for the poor, comforting the dying. To this end we strive personally to walk with God and to invite others to do so.¹⁹

This early statement is evidence of an embodied response to the gospel message that directed Nazarene congregants toward caring for the poor and neglected in the cities through the dual purpose of ministering to the soul and body, reflective of the Wesleyan-holiness emphases on purity and social service. Reading this statement now, 130 years later, it is no surprise that the same activities and practices have shaped the Nazarene *missio ecclesia* that followed. Early ministries and congregations developed through the groundswell of care and concern for the poorest in the community, and, therefore, many new Nazarenes were poor themselves. As the denomination developed across the country, more and more social ministries began: homes for orphaned children and single mothers, rescue missions for persons struggling with alcohol addiction, educational schools, and a deaconess movement “through which women combined a ministry of the Word with a ministry of service to the poor and imprisoned.”²⁰ As the early church grew and developed into a denomination within the United States and spread to new areas of the world, it was clear that preaching the gospel was intricately wedded to social ministries, including health care, child development, and compassionate care after devastating natural disasters, and in war-torn communities.

More than the Sum

Indeed, the Church of the Nazarene is “more than the sum of her parts” through an ecclesiology and ecclesial mission that joins the universal church in bringing the Good News to a world that has not yet tasted what is to come. Countless expressions of “faith working through love” manifest themselves in Nazarene holiness churches scattered across the globe. Though the congregations may be small and often in rural and remote locations—sometimes places where no church has gone—this is no less the full expression of the church. Likewise, pastors and leaders share in a full calling to pastoral ministry, even as they also may be subsistence farmers in a small community or bi-vocational ministers in large metro areas. Through Nazarene heritage, commitments, and practices, pastors and leaders plant the seeds of hope in Jesus and nurture the soil where they have built a home.

Such is the Nazarene ecclesial picture because Christians therein convey the hope they have in Jesus, which is often quite counter-cultural. Hispanic theologian and missiologist Orlando Costas reminds the church who she is called to be in light of Jesus: “We should see in

¹⁹ The statement is from the opening page (technically paginated as page 3 of the ledger book containing the minutes of the “Meeting of the Congregation” on Wednesday, October 30th, 1895. The congregation would later be known as Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene and, at that time, was simply “Church of the Nazarene.” The opening gathering took place on Sunday, October 6th, 1895. The minutes are from their first organizational meeting, and this paragraph appears as part of the first section labeled “Articles of Faith and General Rules of the Church of the Nazarene.” The original ledger is at Point Loma Nazarene University Archives and bound copies in Nazarene Archives.

the incarnation of Christ among the destitute a reminder of the scandal of the gospel and the radical nature of conversion.”²¹ Appealing also to the Apostle Paul’s reminder to the early church, he adds: “The good news of salvation does not come to us via the wise and mighty, but rather by the way of the ignorant and downtrodden (1 Cor. 1:18ff).”²²

God’s reign manifests itself as an “upside-down kingdom,” often hidden from the most learned and powerful. Jesus ministers and shows up in ways that call into question the relationship between power or wealth and faithfulness to God.²³ Latin American theologians of the Integral Mission movement remind the church to look to Jesus “from below,” who appears “within the harsh reality of the hurt, destitute and [marginalized] of the earth who constitute the overwhelming majority of humankind.”²⁴ God’s in-breaking reign often shows up on the margins because these are the places where power, wealth, and influence do not have full control.

It is a Nazarene commitment to the life and ministry of Jesus that opens Christian communities to how God loves and where God reigns—often in the least-expected places. Historically, God’s in-breaking reign drew Nazarenes to the poor and disenfranchised because of the urgency of people in desperate need of the Good News of Jesus. In the church, as Christians are nurtured in the word, gathered in fellowship, and nourished by the body and blood of Jesus, they receive and embrace a new identity. Seeing the world and walking differently within it, they are no longer slaves to the world, but sons and daughters of Christ (Gal. 4:7). In fact, the interruptions of the day may be exactly where Jesus appears to the church. William Cavanaugh writes, “Space is constantly ‘interrupted’ by Christ himself, who appears in the person of the weakest, those who are hungry or thirsty, strangers or naked, sick or imprisoned (Mt. 25:31-16).”²⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion, one must ask, “Why the church?” or, “Does God *need* the *missio ecclesia* for God’s own *missio Dei*?” Of course, the answer is certainly, “No.” Yet, Christians serve and have been invited by a relational God who never stops shaping a people chosen to change the world. What is more, God came in the form of a human to show humanity the way and then gifted the Spirit to accompany and strengthen the church. Christians serve a God who draws near humanity in the most intimate ways. Scripture attests to a God who hears the cries of the oppressed and sees the persons in society that no one sees. God is present with creation,

²¹ Orlando E. Costas, “Contextualization and Incarnation,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, (December 1979): 27.

²² Costas, “Contextualization and Incarnation,” 27.

²³ Term reflected by Donald B. Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom* (Herald Press, PA: 1990).

²⁴ Costas, “Contextualization and Incarnation,” 28.

²⁵ William Cavanaugh, “The World in a Wafer: A Geography of the Eucharist as Resistance to Globalization,” *Modern Theology* 15:2, (April 1999), 192-93. Orlando Costas puts it this way: “The criterion of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ permits us to identify him today. This criterion leads us not only to discover who he is (the Lord and Saviour of the oppressed), but where he is to be found today (among the wretched of the earth) and what it is that he is doing (healing their wounds, breaking their chains of oppression, demanding justice and peace, giving life and imparting hope)” (Costas, “Contextualization and Incarnation,” 29).

journeying with a people and inviting them to bear witness to an alternative reign where all may be saved.

Indeed, something more is happening in the church at large and in the particular gatherings as the Church of the Nazarene. Nazarenes, too, are “more than the sum” because together all of the *ecclesia* are living into God’s new creation.²⁶ As Nazarene congregations gather to listen and learn from the Word of God, fellowship, and partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus, they are united with the whole *ecclesia* into God’s cosmic story of salvation and restoration of the world. In each time and place, Nazarene congregations are invited to look upon others—our neighbors and strangers—with the same eyes and heart of Jesus. As the realities of war, violence, injustice, and oppression take place where the church exists, the body learns to abide with one another and place trust and dependency on God through Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. As the church gathers and is sent out globally, the Lord supernaturally expands our human constructions of time and space.

The growth and expansion of God’s mission through the ecclesial mission cannot be controlled. Yet, we trust God’s promise that God is present with us and that we are invited to participate in God’s making all things new (Revelation 21). Such in-breaking of God resists systematization, compartmentalization, and numerical calculation, for the metrics of God’s reign are entirely different.

In an age of globalization, the reign of God may be found less as a sweeping expanse across the globe, and more through the unexpected encounters that give a glimpse of “God’s kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven.”²⁷ The church of Jesus Christ is “more than the sum of her parts” because in each congregation, the entirety of God arrives in the Word and in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.²⁸ The many are gathered up into one, and the one congregation embodies the many because all are taken up in Christ. Reflective of Jesus’ incarnation as expressed in John 1:1, spiritual writer Henri Nouwen writes:

Jesus’ whole life and mission involve accepting powerlessness and revealing in this powerlessness the limitlessness of God’s love...compassion means going directly to the place and people where suffering is most present. God calls us to build a home there.²⁹

Therefore, more central to who we are as a global denomination is not 30,000 churches, but how Nazarene congregations embody the total transformation of Jesus in our communities by living and ministering among the people. In our unique expressions of “faith working through love” in the church, we lean into God’s mission in the world—a vision that is far greater than we can imagine, much less measure.

²⁶ Church of the Nazarene, “Article XI” *Manual 2023* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2023).

²⁷ The Lord’s Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13.

²⁸ William Cavanaugh puts it this way: “The community may journey without leaving its particular location, because the entire world and more comes to it in the Eucharist.” In *“The World in a Wafer,”* 192.

²⁹ Donald P. McNeill, et al. *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 2006), 27.

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