

Nazarenes in the City

The Strategy for Los Angeles

Paul Benefiel

The minutes of the organizational meeting for the First Church of the Nazarene of Los Angeles, California, dated October 30, 1895, states the following:

Feeling clearly called of God to the carrying on of His work in the conversion of sinners, the sanctification of believers and the building up in holiness of those who may be committed to our care we associate ourselves together as a Church of God under the name of the Church of the Nazarene. 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 so to do."

With this statement Dr. Phineas F. Bresee, and those other hardy souls who joined him on his quest, not only launched a new denomination but also brought on a new day in Christendom. The commitment of the Nazarenes to the cities brought a resurgence of interest among the masses on the part of many groups and churches.

This commitment to the cities was a viable motivation through the early years of this new denomination. As time went by and the church growth concept of "Redemption and Lift" brought about a developing tendency for city churches to relocate into the suburbs where their members were moving.

It is possible that the Church of the Nazarene was moving away from the original purpose of Dr. Phineas F. Bresee as evidenced in a statement he wrote in the "Nazarene Messenger", dated December 31, 1901: "The evidence of the presence of Jesus in our midst is that we bear the gospel, particularly to the poor. This must be genuine; it is more than sentiment; it cannot be simulated nor successfully imitated."

He also wrote in October of that same year: "The first miracle after the baptism with the Holy Ghost was wrought upon a beggar. It means that the first service of a Holy Ghost-baptized church is to the poor; that its ministry is to those who need them the most. As the Spirit was upon Jesus to preach the gospel to the poor, so His Spirit is upon His servants for the same purpose." Although the founding fathers of the Church of the Nazarene saw that their primary ministry was to the poor, and to the cities, it also apparent that the churches of this denomination were generally moving away from the poor and out of the cities. Most churches were not able to cope with the turmoil, the tension, and the frustrations of the inner city. However, it is evident that in recent years there has been a revival of interest in the cities and concern for the poor, among the people called Nazarenes. It appears that the church has become awakened to the reality stated by Earl Parvin in his significant book, *Missions USA* "Urban America is a mission field because most of the 75 percent of Americans who live in the

city are unevangelized. The unevangelized are found in every economic level of the city and in all of the various residential areas. Urban America may be divided into two main divisions: the central city in which 30 percent of Americans live, and the suburbs containing 45 percent of the populace.

Yes, urban America is a mission field, for it is in the cities where the greatest potential for church growth resides. Not only do the most people live in the cities of America but the greatest number of unevangelized people live there as well. The 1980 census reveals that 81 percent of the blacks, 88 percent of the Hispanics, 46 percent of the Asians live in the central city, thus again reminding us that the mission fields have come to America.

Los Angeles

The city of Los Angeles is no exception to the significant demographic changes taking place in the cities of America. The city of Los Angeles was first settled in 1781. These past two centuries have seen the settlement develop into a great city...the second largest in America.

Although many changes have taken place in the past, possibly the most dramatic changes are occurring today. For "the city of the Angels" has become the city of the immigrants. People are flooding into Los Angeles from all parts of the world, looking for a new home and new opportunities. They are drawn there for the same reason people have thronged to Los Angeles through the centuries. The warm, balmy climate and unique geographic location; surrounded by the ocean on one side and the mountains on the other. These immigrants come searching for their pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, but all too often find disillusionment rather than riches. This is the opportunity for the Church of the Nazarene to share with the masses in the city that which can satisfy them more than the wealth of gold or silver.

The Church of the Nazarene was founded in this city and now the cradle of the church has become one of its newest mission fields.

In a study developed for the Los Angeles District by the Fuller Evangelistic Association, it was found that the total district had experienced a population growth from 4,943,289 to 6,500,000 between the years of 1970 and 1981. They also found that the ethnic populations increased from 24.8% to 50% of the population during the same years. A recent study released by the County of Los Angeles indicates that this county (which is mainly comprised of the S.M.S.A. of the City of Los Angeles) now is comprised of 46% non-Latino whites, 31% Latinos, and 10% Asians and Pacific Islanders.

The Fuller Evangelistic Association also projected that by the year 2000 A.D. the Los Angeles basin population will be 85% ethnic peoples.

Facing this avalanche of immigrants who were coming to this city, the Los Angeles District Advisory Board adopted a Strategy in 1976 to address this challenge. This Strategy was as follows:

1. Alert District
2. Pray the Lord of the Harvest

3. Enlist Workers
4. Seek Funding
5. Organize New Congregations
6. Praise the Lord

This strategy has proved to be quite successful as every effort has been made to mobilize the district to reach as many of these new Americans as possible for Christ and the Church.

1. Alert District

Crucial to the plans for reaching the multitudes was to share the demographics with the churches of the district to bring them to an awareness of the challenge, and to set reachable goals. In May of 1975, when I was elected district superintendent of the L.A. District we had 6 ethnic congregations. The District Advisory Board and District Home Mission Board agreed that a goal of 60 ethnic congregations on this district was a reasonable, reachable goal. It has been presented to the district assembly and this goal has been agreed upon district-wide.

Through the succeeding years there has been a constant effort to share with the pastors and people of this district how this fits into the priorities of the district. Through the district paper, letters, seminars, missionary conventions, audio visual presentations, the district superintendent's report to the district assembly...at every possible occasion we attempted to inform the district of the need and how we were addressing that need. A symbolic example of the efforts made to educate the district would be that the speaker for the evening service of the district missionary convention in May of 1985 was one of our Hispanic pastors who preached in Spanish and the message was interpreted into English for the convention.

Without question, alerting the district has been a significant factor in laying the groundwork for the cross-cultural ministry the Lord has called us to do.

2. Pray the Lord of the Harvest

From the beginning, the scriptural promise that has become real to this district is Matthew 9:35-39

"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest."

3. Enlist Workers

In the Church of the Nazarene there seems to be no shortage of pastors for our English speaking churches in America. Our church has been blessed with a tremendous corps of gifted and well trained pastors in this area. However, that is not true in the case of pastors for other language groups. When a new ethnic church is being planted where do you look for leadership? We found the answer to this need wrapped up in the promise. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest." (Matt. 9:39) It may

sound a bit simplistic but we actually took this promise at face value and began to pray for the specific places, and the Lord has always directed us to someone to fill that need.

4. Train Workers

However, many of those that the Lord directed us to were not well educated, ordained pastors. In fact, most were laymen that had very little formal education. The Lord did direct us to some who were well trained to train others. From that philosophy has developed two significant Bible colleges on this district, one for the Spanish speaking and one for the Armenian and Arab students.

Our Spanish speaking students are trained at the *Instituto Teologica Nazareno*, whose president is Dr. Jose Rodriguez. The classes for the Instituto are held at Los Angeles First Church where the third floor of the educational building is dedicated to this purpose. There are presently 60 students attending these classes and the plans are to prepare for 100 students next fall.

The Armenian and Arab students are trained at the *Armenian Bible College* which is located at the old Pasadena College Campus with Dr. Y. Babikian serving as president. Some 40 students are presently enrolled at this college.

Both of these Bible Colleges have been approved by the Nazarene Bible College and the American Association for Bible Colleges to receive credit through N.B.C. for courses taken at the respective schools.

Planting new churches among the immigrants and ethnic people must not be constructed to be the only needs of the city. In fact, it became evident early that training was needed for our English speaking people who felt called to work in the city. To meet this specific need the *P.F. Bresee Institute* was founded at Los Angeles First Church. This was a multifaceted approach to learning, from graduate training in cross-cultural and urban studies to summer ministries training for Nazarene college students. This program is fully accredited and highly respected not only in the Church of the Nazarene but also by many other denominations and organizations who have felt a similar concern for the cities of America.

5. Seek Funding

How many times in the church someone has commented that there is no end to the good we could do if we had enough people and enough money to support the program. That statement is especially true when it comes to developing work among the ethnic people. On the Los Angeles District we have received financial support from such agencies as World Vision but most of the funding has come through our own people. We have a "Home Mission Club" letter which goes out monthly to some 1,600 members on this district. Our Home Mission Budget has been the backbone of our funding. However, we could have never done what we have done had it not been for special funding that has come to aid this ministry from the General Church of the Nazarene.

6. Organize New Congregations

The heart of our strategy for reaching the City of Los Angeles was to plant new churches wherever possible. As we shared the concern the Lord has placed on our heart, pastors of our established churches began to feel the burden to minister to all the people of their community. One by one they came to me seeking approval to begin a new work among the unreached people of their community. We would pray together for pastoral leadership and the Lord would provide. Sometimes it operated in reverse. As God would direct a minister or a committed layperson to make themselves available for the work, and we would place them in a location that seemed to suit their gifts and graces best.

Two major factors contributed to the mushrooming of new works throughout the city and across the district: First we found that organized churches were often willing to open up their facilities and their hearts to help in the organizing of a new work in their community, and secondly, we found that a key to the development was to appoint coordinators from within each of the ethnic groups and those coordinators became the catalyst around which the growth took place. Thus, the multi-congregational church and the ethnic coordinator became the heart of our thrust in organizing new congregations.

7. Praise the Lord

As the years add together and the churches begin to multiply, the goal of 60 ethnic congregations on this district appears to be more and more of a real possibility. As of this writing in March of 1986 we report a total of 35 ethnic congregations: 20 Latin, 5 Korean, 3 Chinese, 2 Black, 3 Armenian, 1 Filipino, and 1 Arab.

However, there are many, many other ways our pastors and our laymen are reaching out to the masses of the city and ministering to them in the name of our Lord. Dr. Bresee would be pleased to see that the church he started, and the only church he pastored in the Church of the Nazarene, is carrying out his mandate in a multiplicity of ministries. Yes, it is rewarding to know that from the largest church on the district to the smallest, and many of those in between, the spirit of our Lord is being lived out in love and compassion to those who pass by...as well as to those who live nearby. And when I see all of this, and am very quiet, it seems to me I can hear the words of our Lord "In as much as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matt. 25:40) And that is why it is important, that is why we are making the extra effort...that is why we dared to dream the dream and follow the vision, for this is our way of bringing praise to the Name of our Lord.

<i>District Population</i>			
<i>Year</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Ethnic Population</i>	<i>% Ethnic Population</i>
1970	4,943,289	1,448,384	24.8%
1977	6,075,000	2,675,000	44%
1981	6,500,000	3,250,000	50%

<i>Los Angeles District Church Congregations</i>				
<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>1975</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1985</i>	<i>Goal-(1990)</i>
Latin	1	10	19	27
Korean	1	2	5	8
Chinese	2	2	3	6
Black	2	2	2	5
Armenian	0	2	3	6
Filipino	0	0	1	3
Arab	0	0	1	3
SE Asian	0	0	0	2
Total	6	18	34	60

Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene Ministry Among the Poor

1. Food Pantry and Clothing Closets.
2. Trained lay persons are available daily to counsel and give emergency aid to people who are in need. An average of 140 families and individuals receive help each month.
3. Counseling Center.
4. Professional Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists see clients on a sliding scale basis with no one turned away because of an inability to pay. The average client load is approximately fifteen.
5. The Church as a Community of Acceptance and Healing.
6. A large percentage (between 30% and 50%) of those attending services and participating in the life are among the urban poor.
7. Networking and Referral.
8. Individuals in need of shelter or employment receive counseling with assistance given by way of putting them in touch with appropriate resource agencies.
9. Jobs Program
10. Individuals in need of temporary employment are put to work around the church. Four to six individuals per month are assisted. The program is being enlarged to employ four to six individuals daily in community service work (subject to funding).

<i>Los Angeles District</i>	
District Superintendent	Paul Benefiel
Latin Coordinator	Alfred Cortez
Korean Coordinator	David Kwon
Armenian Coordinator	Habib Alajai

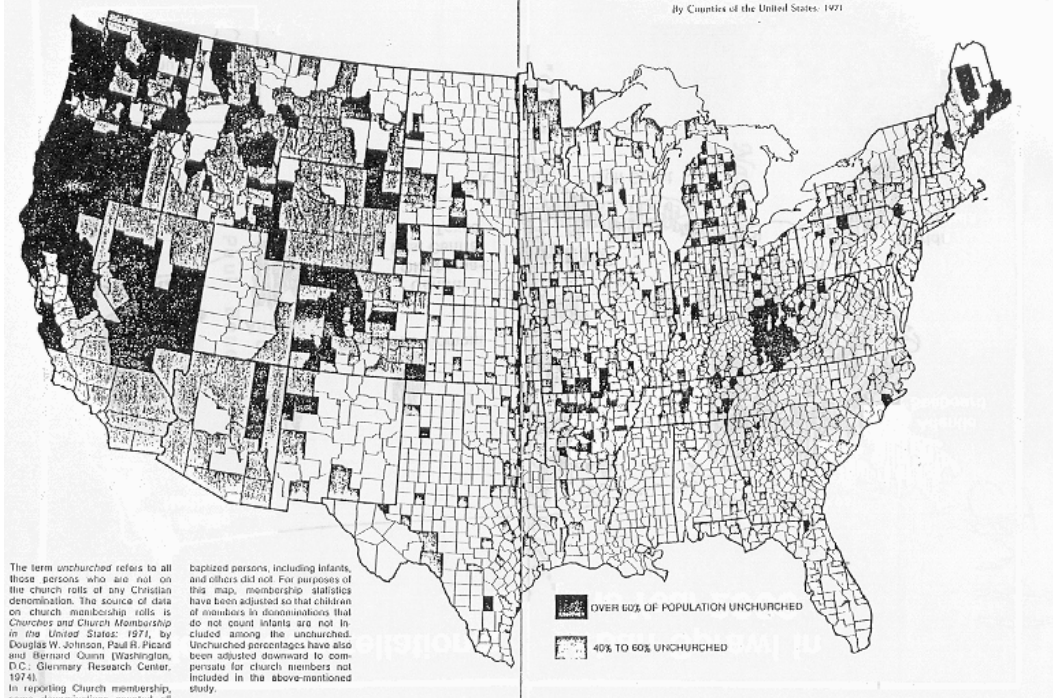
Black Coordinator

Roger Bowman

Los Angeles District Ethnic Congregations

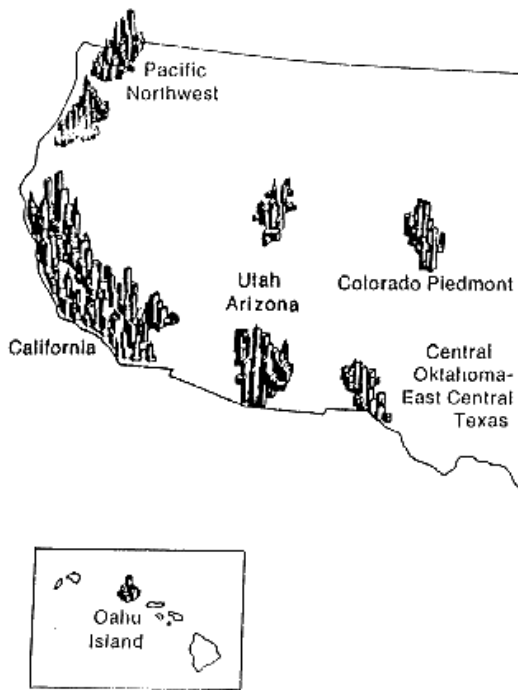
Alhambra	Chinese Spanish	LA Highland Park	Spanish
Altadina	Black	LA Korean	Korean
Baldwin Park	Spanish	LA North	Spanish
Duarte	Spanish (class)	Montebello	Armenian
El Monte	Spanish	Monterey Park	Chinese
Glendale	Armenian Korean	Monterey Park Trinity	Chinese
La Puente	Spanish	Northridge	Spanish(class)
LA Eagle Rock	Spanish	Oxnard	Spanish
LA Echo Park	Korean	Pasadena Bresee	Armenian Arab
LA El Sereno	Spanish	Santa Maria	Spanish
LA Elysian Park	Spanish	Santa Monica	Spanish
LA First	Spanish Korean (2) Filipino	South Pasadena	Spanish
LA Grace	Black Spanish	Sun Valley	Spanish
		Temple City	Spanish
		Grover City	Spanish (class)

PERCENT OF POPULATION UNCHURCHED
By Counties of the United States, 1971



The term unchurched refers to all those persons who are not on the church rolls of any Christian denomination. The source of data on church membership rolls is *Churches and Church Membership in the United States: 1971*, by Douglas W. Johnson, Paul R. Fieand and Bernard Quinn (Washington, D.C.: Glenmary Research Center, 1974). In reporting Church membership, some denominations counted all baptized persons, including infants, and others did not. For purposes of this map, membership statistics have been adjusted so that children of members in denominations that do not count infants are not included among the unchurched. Unchurched percentages have also been adjusted downward to compensate for church members not included in the above-mentioned study.

Regional Constellations:



Urban Sprawl In The Year 2000



Regional Constellations:

Urban Sprawl In The Year 2000

