

THE CULTURE OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

Tuesday, July 11

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When I was asked to make this presentation the idea was that I would talk with you about how the church functions. Many of you could respond in a greater way. But I'm going to share with you today my perspective as to how we get things done within this organization we call the Church of the Nazarene.

The question was asked, "How do we deal with this bureaucracy that sometimes seems so cold and hard." "How do we get anything done?" Another question was "How do we balance evangelism with education?"

As I began to think about this, I thought it would be wise to go back to the start and to ask ourselves the question of "What is our mission? What is the purpose of our church? What is the purpose of us as a people?"

So we go back to the scripture. Brother Litswele reminded us this morning of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ just before he left this earth when he said to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

This Great Commission applies to us individually, as well as a collective group as a church. Individually, He calls us to be personally involved in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and

being involved in discipleship of new believers. Collectively, we all have joined what we call the Church of the Nazarene because it best represents our beliefs and because it teaches the Great Commission – its foundation, its motivation. The driving force behind all that we do is the Great Commission. Collectively, we have a responsibility to use all the resources we have within the denomination to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

Today we are here, as members of the Church, looking for ways to make a difference in our world. By your very presence here, you have expressed an interest and a desire to prepare yourself to become more effectively involved in carrying out this mission.

What is the mission of the Church? Let's look at what the *Manual* says. The *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* says:

“The Church of the Nazarene exists to serve as an instrument for advancing the kingdom of God through the preaching and teaching of the gospel throughout the world. Our well-defined commission is to preserve and propagate Christian holiness as set forth in the Scriptures, through the conversion of sinners, the reclamation of backsliders, and the entire sanctification of believers.”

“Our objective is a spiritual one, namely, to evangelize as a response to the Great Commission of our Lord to ‘go and make disciples of all nations.’”

As a body, we have consciously and deliberately made decisions from the beginning of the Church to be a global church. By design, we have attempted to develop a Church that is self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing. Our philosophy and various strategies center around these three key foundational principles in our development.

The Church of the Nazarene, as we understand it, is the only Protestant church that has been as successful as we have been in developing a truly global church in terms of its government and structure—we are a unique group. Our general assemblies are for legislation and inspiration in contrast to other groups that gather for inspiration and do their legislation separately.

A global church does not have to be a fragmented church. It is, and must continue to be, a deliberate process of development, working together, facing the challenges, and above all, seeking God’s wisdom as we move into these new areas where no others have been. We must never allow ourselves to develop a multiple church or multiple systems. We cannot allow one system for the U.S. and another one for the world. We are, and must be, one even though it creates many challenges. In the process, there are many frustrations and misunderstandings.

There are cultural differences to be considered. In fact, that is one of the purposes of this conference this week – to look at these cultural differences and see what they mean to us in the area of education. We must be cautious in our times of frustration as we make judgments of the church that we recognize that we are a developing church. We have not faced many of the challenges that we face today before in our history. The continuing globalization of the church is part of our maturing process as a denomination that enables partnership of all the component pieces of the church to become a reality.

It is easy for us to become judgmental—but again—we must keep our focus on our commitment to a common mission and not become sidetracked in the process that would cause us to fragment. We must be very sensitive and understanding of each other, and our cultural diversity, as we pull together. The purpose of this conference is to unify our global focus and purpose.

This conference was planned, as I said this morning, with no pre-conceived ideas. But, we come with mutual respect, desiring to learn from each other, as we continue on this important journey. We have come with a common sense of mission. We desire to further strengthen our relationships and find even greater ways in which to carry out the mission.

A couple of years ago we were approached by Campus Crusade for Christ about our involvement in the Jesus Film. We arranged a meeting; they came to Kansas City. We sat around a table and the first words out of their mouth were “We have an apology to make to you. We believed that we could win the world for Jesus Christ all by ourselves. We have come to the conclusion that that is impossible. Therefore, we would like to partner with the Church of the Nazarene because you have a system of follow-up and you have a network around the world that potentially could reach millions of people for Jesus Christ and to disciple them after they have accepted Jesus.”

They offered us a million dollars in equipment, if we would support the teams it would take. They offered their files; they offered us all of their system on how they went about organizing the Jesus film, the fundraising etc. They offered us all of their materials—with full rights to adapt them in any way we desired. This was a golden opportunity. We had to make a decision.

We could have said “No. We just can’t manage the results.” That was our option but we said, “Yes.” God has blessed this tool in the Church of the Nazarene beyond all comprehension. Today –just 2 years later–the Church of the Nazarene has shown the Jesus film to over 5 million people; 939,000 people have accepted Jesus Christ through the film; and 313,000 have become actively involved in follow-up.

Some have struggled with this tremendous growth – feeling that we should only try to get saved the number that we can manage. My contention is that we must go back to the start.

Jesus told us to go and tell the world and make disciples.

We look at the New Testament church and we realize that thousands were added to the church daily. The growth of the New Testament church was not limited to what they could manage. Rather the church had to rise to the challenge. They had to develop new paradigms. They had to change the status quo—and God blessed their faith by adding to the church daily.

Today, we are faced with that same challenge. We must re-evaluate all of our systems, our ways of thinking, and find new ways to change the world at a faster rate than we have ever known.

Again, one of the purposes of this conference is to explore the role of education in this period of development—and ask ourselves the question—what role does education play—and how can educators continue to play the important role that God has called them to.

World Mission is committed to not just evangelism, but to education as well. We must maintain that balance. We must properly disciple new believers and then develop many of them into a well-trained and educated clergy.

Collectively, over the years, through our general assemblies we have developed a representative global structure of the church. The various areas of responsibility of education have been divided to assure proper care for each of these important areas of the church between World Mission, the International Board of Education, and Office of the Ministry.

World Mission has been given the responsibility of the administration of education outside the United States. The Commissioner of Education and the International Board of Education have the responsibility of advocacy, assuring that we maintain a high level of education in all areas of

the church. Office of the Ministry has been given the responsibility of developing and managing the ministerial Course of Study.

Over the course of this week, you will hear more about the IBOE and Office of the Ministry. My purpose this afternoon is to direct my comments toward World Mission and the administrative side of the educational process.

As you are aware, we have divided the world outside of the United States into 6 regions. Each region has a regional director who has been elected by the General Board to represent the broad church interests in their respective region. These regional directors are an extension of the World Mission Division Director who gives broad direction according to the desired direction of the Board of General Superintendents and the General Assembly. From a World Mission perspective, the Regional Director is the “chief strategist” of his respective region. He manages the personnel, the budget, and gives strategic direction.

The Church of the Nazarene has always held education as a priority. In these recent years of development, more resources have been designated to education in the form of the development of Regional Education Coordinators. These Coordinators work under the direction of the Regional Director as it relates to the education of their respective region staying sensitive to the unique and special educational needs of the region and constantly looking for resources to help meet those needs.

Most recently, Dr. Bustle felt the need to give even greater emphasis to the role of education by appointing Dr. Bob Woodruff as our Education Coordinator for World Mission. He has already been working with a number of you in various education plans. We believe that this structure

will enable the denomination to keep its focus on education and not allow it to take a second place on the list of priorities.

We further believe that there is value in a coordinated effort within the structure of the Church. Since we all work as part of a team, we have the same mission. We help to protect each other from mistakes that could be costly to the very mission that we believe in.

It is sometimes easy to throw rocks, by yelling, “control” or “bureaucracy.” There are multiple components of the Church of the Nazarene. Each of us here today represents those components. There is value in multiple minds working together. These are the checks and balances of a “developing church.”

There are times that we hear words like “personal agenda” or “guarding the turf.” Some express concern that the leadership of the church is “out of touch.” While the leadership expresses concern that some don’t see the “big picture.” Consequently, many times we talk past each other and fail to accomplish the task that our Lord has called us to do.

Again, it is easy for us to throw rocks when something does not fit our particular point of view. But let me reframe the picture today and perhaps give us a different view.

As stated numerous times before, we are a growing, developing, and dynamic church. I believe that we are facing many challenges today that have never been faced before due to the fact that we are a growing church.

We are simply working in new areas and we must find new ways to deal with the issues that we face. In that process there are changes that need to be made constantly. There is a proper time

and a proper manner in which we can make those changes. The changes may be too slow for some and too fast for others.

Further, I believe that we must respect each other, realizing that it may not be a “personal agenda” but that we are all a group of people who love God, who love the church, and who desire to do the very best work we can within our respective roles. I prefer to see each of us as a team member, on a common mission, that daily seeks the face of God and His wisdom and direction.

Collectively, we can make a difference in this world versus pulling separately with personal agendas that limit our possibilities. Again, we must keep our focus on the purpose of the journey that we are on. Jesus gave us the marching orders to “go and make disciples.”

In conclusion, I recently came across a letter sent to Larry and Addie Garmon in 1965. They are just now in the process of retiring after having spent 35 years in the jungle of Peru, working among the Aguarunas. This letter is written by a fellow missionary, Clyde Gollither, who was on furlough at the time it was written and I quote:

“Congratulations! We rejoice with you that at last you are on the field of your calling. Wasn’t it a thrill the first time you set your foot on Peruvian soil? I am sure that even now your heart is burdened as you sense the tremendous need. Never lose that feeling. If you would accomplish that which you are called to do, there must be that something inside you that constrains you to love, and to work and to do your best. Beware that you never become indifferent to the need and suffering around you. Keep your heart tender. Remind yourselves that you have come to serve and not to be served. Never let yourself

think that these people are inferior. They might be less educated, but always remember there are many things that they can do better than we can.

We shall be praying that you will soon win the hearts of those you have come to serve. Show them you love them and you'll soon have their hearts.”

We are on a mission. God has called us. We are committed. We have a church. We have joined together with that church. We are together. We are a team within the structure of the church. Great things can happen, as we understand we are a developing church. We are working in new areas. God can continue to use us if we will continue to be tender and open to His leading and direction.