

THE WORLD *Our Parish*

BY *JESSE C. MIDDENDORF*

FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS of its existence, the Church of the Nazarene has echoed the words of John Wesley: “The world is my parish.” And we also join Wesley in asserting that the work of the Church is to make disciples who are, in life and spirit, like Jesus Christ.

This dual emphasis has characterized the Church of the Nazarene at its best. We believe that the transforming grace of God is available to all, whoever they are, wherever they are found, whatever they may have done. God leaves no one outside the scope of His gospel. That is why we work in 146 world areas, in nations of every size and complexion, in every hemisphere. Your next-door neighbor and the teenager in the remotest Himalayan village both are objects of God’s love.

We go to awaken all persons to the God who speaks to them in their darkness and fear. The Holy Spirit—God everywhere present—desires to so transform them that the very core of being within each one is reordered and they find themselves hungering to please Him, to know Him, to serve Him, to share Him.

In Paraguay I once sat in a service led by a young Peruvian pastor. Representatives from Argentina and Brazil also joined the Paraguayan congregation that day. I had ordained the young pastor earlier that year in the mountains of Peru, and at that time he had made known his call to serve as a missionary to Paraguay. With his wife and young son he moved to a Paraguayan church that had closed a decade before. He opened the work again, and attendance soon averaged more than 75. Now lay leaders are being sent from his church to plant other churches in Paraguay and Brazil.

In Buenos Aires I watched a district express

deep love and appreciation to its superintendent and his family as they closed out six years of service and prepared to depart for Africa. They had been assigned as missionaries to open the work in the last Spanish-speaking nation in the world in which there was no Church of the Nazarene.

In the United States a magnificent church building stood vacant, a tragic reminder of a once-strong congregation that had disintegrated over theological confusion and the lack of a cohering vision. A few miles away a thriving African-American Nazarene congregation was badly in need of expanded facilities but had insufficient resources to purchase the spacious building. A visionary district superintendent and advisory board found a way to bring the congregation and the vacant building together to make a dramatic difference in the neighborhood.

The work of missions is an everywhere thing! No nation or culture is exempt from the call to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

We go to call all nations and all cultures to be utterly Christian. We also call every new believer to holiness. The latter task is not ancillary to our work. It *is* the work! It is the will of God that His people be holy. It is essential that we establish new believers in holy fellowship, in churches that will teach them, disciple them, nurture their growing faith, and call them to the holy life. We must present them with the opportunity to enter into the experience of entire sanctification through the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It is essential also that we nurture them in growing likeness to Christ in attitude, lifestyle, and purpose.

“Make disciples of all nations,” said Jesus. “[Teach] them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19, 20). That is our work. And the world is our parish! ♦



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