

## **District Superintendent - 2009**

Greetings in the powerful name of Jesus! It is my pleasure to welcome you to this 67<sup>th</sup> District Assembly of the Northwest Indiana District. I'm most grateful for the privilege of working with a wonderful group of pastors and laypersons for the cause of the kingdom in Northwest Indiana! To each of you individually, along with the officers, boards and committees of the district, I want to express my deep appreciation for your investment in the work of the district this past year.

It is a special privilege to have Dr. J.K. Warrick and Patty with us again this year. Their warm hearts and genuine spirits are a source of encouragement to all of us. We have learned to appreciate greatly Dr. Warrick's ministry of preaching and leadership at this critical time in the history of the Church of the Nazarene. Additional special guests include Dr. John Bowling, President of Olivet Nazarene University and his wife, Jill, and Brian Allen, Vice President for Institutional Advancement at Olivet.

I refer you to page four of your assembly booklet for an overview of attendance and financial statistics for the past ten years as well as the past years fund report.

While statistics never tell the whole story, they are important indicators of the health of any organization. I am concerned about the statistical trends we are seeing in key financial and ministry areas. There are always stories behind the statistics. I am perhaps more aware than anyone of the varied circumstances in local churches that have impacted our statistical results this year. Of course the worst economic climate that our nation has experienced in decades has had a significant impact everywhere. We all know that Northern Indiana has been particularly hard hit. That being acknowledged, we must continue to give strong effort toward full payment of the four funding areas that are an integral part of who we are as a connectional church. Sincere

thanks to the 23 churches listed on page 7 of your booklet that paid all of their “fair share” fund payments in full! And, referencing the “stories behind the statistics,” I want to thank every pastor and layperson representing 40 Northwest Indiana churches for your continued faithfulness in a difficult year. A year which, for some, has called for personal sacrifice in the midst of diminished income. Let’s believe that our God is, indeed, able to do “exceeding, abundantly beyond all we can ask or think according to His power at work within us.”

Allow me to speak to some important happenings this past year:

The Mission Development Board has continued to work diligently as we look forward in the areas of Church Revitalization and Church Planting. We know that districts do not plant churches...local churches plant churches. Frankly, we have not done well in planting new churches over the past several years. The Mission Development Board has grappled with how best to move forward. Dr. Warrick made the statement recently that the only districts that are experiencing growth are planting new churches. MDB Board Chairman Mark DeYoung will be sharing a strategy the Mission Development Board is asking us to prayerfully consider for planting new churches in his report to the assembly.

We are in a rapidly changing environment in the financing of the local church, the district and the general church as well. The financial pressure we are experiencing as a result of the recent economic downturn has made a significant impact. It is our desire as a district to effectively partner with local churches to provide resources for mission effectiveness. To do so we will have to find sources of income beyond the normal funding streams. We are in the process of developing an Enduring Gifts Endowment for the Northwest Indiana District. A comprehensive policy and procedures manual has been developed to guide us. We will be

sharing a presentation regarding this program later in the assembly. This initiative has the potential to be one of our most important priorities as we move into the future.

With significant help from the Segue Foundation, the four Indiana Church of the Nazarene districts were successful in qualifying for a grant from the Lilly Foundation. The amount of the grant is \$890,000. A planning board with three members from each of the Indiana districts has been working this past year on how we will utilize these funds. There are three key areas we will be addressing:

1. Physical Wellness of pastors
2. Financial Wellness of pastors
3. Church Board Training as it relates to physical and financial wellness of pastors.

The stress of ministry is taking a significant toll on pastors with attrition rates continuing to rise. We believe this project is a significant first step to address important issues our pastors are facing. The potential connection between the Enduring Gifts Endowment and the focus of the Lilly Grant has exciting possibilities for our district. All pastors have received information regarding a “Health Risk Assessment” event for all Indiana Nazarene pastors in July. Additional information will be given in a presentation tomorrow.

I’m very pleased that Tom Hunter has agreed to serve us as Sunday School Ministries Chairman filling the vacancy left by Jeff Case. Initial planning has begun for two important equipping events this year. Please mark November 7 on your calendar for a district wide Ministry Equipping Day event. We are in the early stages of a spring event focusing on Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries on April 24 with a special emphasis on the Adult Bible Fellowship model. You will receive more detailed information in the near future regarding both of these events.

This past year I have endeavored to focus attention on prayer as essential to personal and corporate spiritual vitality. Steve Weber's presentation at last year's assembly was informative and challenging. In the fall, three of our pastors had Steve back for a three day "Prayer Saturated Weekend" in their churches with excellent results. By the way, I have confirmed with Steve that he continues to be available to local churches for these events. Then, in January, Steve and his colleague, Gary Schmitz, led district pastors and staff in a 3 day event called "Fresh Encounter." It was truly a time of spiritual renewal for all those who attended.

The challenge unique to all of us is to maintain a vital connectedness to God as a life-long pattern. Our greatest enemy is preoccupation with the incessant demands of busyness. The question we must continue to ask is: "Are we desperate for His presence?" Is John 15 operating in our lives? Jesus makes it abundantly clear: "*Apart from me you can do nothing*"!

In the report of the Board of General Superintendents to the General Board this past February, the following world-wide growth overview was presented:

Africa: +12.6%

Asia-Pacific + 2.5%

Caribbean + 5.8%

Eurasia + 18.2%

Mexico and Central America + 3.8%

South America + 7.9%

USA/Canada + 0.4%

It's obvious that from a pure growth perspective we are not doing well in the US and Canada. Surely we all believe God has something better in mind for us! But there are realities for us to face and decisions for us to make about our future.

On April 16, 1998, a huge tornado devastated Nashville, Tennessee. Coming from west to east, it swept across downtown Nashville, across the Cumberland River impacting Nashville First Church, and on into the older section of East Nashville. Alice and I lived in East Nashville when I served on staff at Nashville First Church. We knew the area well. Not too long after the tornado, we were visiting relatives in Nashville. We were eager to see what had happened. As we made our way down Eastland Avenue, the gateway into East Nashville, we could not believe what we were seeing. There was a sea of blue plastic as far as we could see covering, it seemed, almost every home. The beautiful old trees were gone or stripped. As we continued to drive through the area, we struggled to know where we were. Old landmarks were no longer there. At times we felt like we were in a place we'd never been before. And, in some ways, we were.

As I was writing this report, it occurred to me that Alice's and my experience driving through East Nashville is eerily similar to what is happening in the church today. In my 14 years as your district superintendent, the landscape has changed immeasurably. We have entered a unique time in history. While the implications of this unique time we are living in have become clearer over the past decade, there is a growing sense that we have only begun to catch a glimpse of the realities going forward. Things will never be the same!

It has been the growing awareness that our effectiveness in the North American church continues to diminish that has led us to make church revitalization a priority on the N.W. Indiana district. I must confess that the results have been mixed. I hasten to add that there are pastors who have given themselves wholeheartedly to the revitalization effort, sometimes at personal cost. And, there are pastors who continue to give themselves to revitalization who are beginning to see the fruits of their labor. There are so many variables involved in transitioning churches from being status quo, inward focused and program centered to vision driven, outward focused

mission outposts in their communities. And, there is risk involved. But there is greater risk in failing to do so. So, here we are, increasingly aware that what has worked in the past is not working now. The realities we face are not going to change. So, what is our way forward?

Gordon McDonald recently wrote an article that caught my attention. He was speaking of the economic meltdown we have been experiencing and asked a pertinent question:

If we are a part of a biblical movement that believes God is continuously present and always speaking, then what is he saying now? The new kind of leadership (we need) will be ultra-sensitive to this question, taking a fresh look into the Scriptures and using what's there to challenge us to face some truths about our present way of life that we might otherwise prefer to avoid.

What is God saying to us in these unprecedented days? And, are we listening? As a start let me share with you what I sense God is saying to me:

I cannot stay where I am and we can't stay where we are. In the pattern of God's interaction with his people across the centuries, beginning with Abraham, God is always calling us to "go out not knowing where we are going"...knowing that he will show us the way forward as we obey Him. The more I ponder our true heritage as a denomination, the core of what brought us into existence, the more convinced I am that we stand on a strong biblical foundation. We need to recover the spirit and vision of those whose vision and passion birthed the Church of the Nazarene. But we also need to apply that vision and passion with present tense effectiveness in the current culture of every community.

1. Our way forward includes both spiritual revitalization and structural revitalization. While both are essential, spiritual revitalization, both personal and corporate, is foundational to everything. If God is not obviously present in our personal lives and the life of the church, in interpersonal relationships and as we worship together, the mission we have been given will never be accomplished. I lament the petty things that we allow to rob us of our unity and that sabotage our effectiveness. We are not to be ignorant of Satan's devices, but unfortunately I'm afraid we often are, to our personal detriment and the kingdom's as well.
2. Personal spiritual revitalization for each of us begins in the "secret place." It cannot be ignored. There is no substitute. The idea that we are too busy to pray is a strategy of the enemy. Referring again to John 15 verse 4:

*Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me.*

Visualize with me the joining of a vine to its supporting branch. Such connectedness! Failure to engage in a daily time of prayer and the word renders us useless, regardless of what the outward trappings of success may look like.

"... if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, John says, "you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon."

Resources to help us are more readily available than ever, including prayer resources on the district web site.

3. Corporate spiritual revitalization is essential! Again, prayer is the key! We have all been stirred by the ministry of Jim Cymbala and the Brooklyn Tabernacle story. We know that

God built the Brooklyn Tabernacle ministry and has sustained it over all these years because it functions as a “House of Prayer.” We remember the words of Jesus: “My house shall be called a house of prayer...”, yet the reality is that a local church functioning as a house of prayer is quite rare. Why? We are preoccupied with lesser things. There is something that happens in the atmosphere of corporate prayer that transforms a local congregation as nothing else will! I have included in every delegate’s packet a document titled, “The Local Church Becoming a House of Prayer.” The mode may be different in each local situation, but I challenge each pastor and lay leader to seek God’s direction to make your church a house of prayer.

4. Making disciples must reclaim its rightful place as the mission of each local church. The challenge of George Hunter from the Millennial Conference of 9 years ago continues to ring in my ears: “The question for you Nazarenes is whether you will be more Wesleyan than you presently are.” The reason for the existence of the Church of the Nazarene has been well defined: “To spread scriptural holiness across the land.” But the genius of Wesley also included a “method” of enabling those who, having experienced the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in heart cleansing and empowerment, were helped to “grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” There was organization and structure. There was a plan and a method for discipling believers! There was accountability and spiritual encouragement. The renewed emphasis of our General Superintendents regarding the essential place of “making disciples” is welcome and needed. We have replaced the making of disciples with programs and activities. I’m in settings more times than I would like to admit where the lack of effective leaders and of spiritual depth is lamented. But if believers are not disciplined, what can we expect?

If a local church is to be a disciple-making church, the pastor will have to lead and model the process. Michael Henderson, author of the book “A Model for Making Disciples”, made the following observation in a recent issue of Holiness Today:

For churches to improve discipleship, the pastor must be engaged in disciple-making as a model to the congregation. Then the church needs to encourage situations and environments in which people have the opportunity to talk about their spiritual lives. From the earliest days of the Church of the Nazarene, personal witness was an integral part of worship. Every church service ought to have a model standing before the congregation saying, “This is what has actually happened to me.”

A significant connection exists between holiness and discipleship. The message of holiness is basically the alignment of our will to the will of Christ. This happens not only in momentary experiences, but also in the cut and thrust of personal commitment expressed in decisions and actions reflecting one’s core values.

Spiritual conversations involving mature as well as new believers, and centering on the dynamic nature of discipleship, enable those who are struggling to fully align their lives with Christ.

So, here we are finding our way across this new landscape. The wonderful thing about this, even with the uncertainties we face, is that God is already way out ahead of us, calling us to

follow Him into uncharted territory. He has always promised to guide us if we will asking and seek, and knock! This is no time to sound uncertain trumpets! If we are anything, we are a people of hope! Hope is in our DNA. Hope...a belief in a positive outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life. Hope...which implies a certain amount of wanting, wishing, as well as suffering or perseverance. Hope... believing that a better, more positive outcome is possible even when there is some evidence to the contrary. This hope is not a fuzzy, poorly anchored hope, either. It is steadfast and sure, built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. It is a lively hope, anchored in Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We have every right and a wonderful opportunity, in the midst of the challenges facing us, to be the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ...His called out ones! Let's allow the words of Jeremiah to ring in our ears and to make their way into our hearts. They were uttered at one of the bleakest moments in Israel's history as they were being led into captivity:

*<sup>11</sup> I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. <sup>12</sup> "When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen. <sup>13</sup> "When you come looking for me, you'll find me. "Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, <sup>14</sup> I'll make sure you won't be disappointed."*

(Jeremiah 29:11-14 *The Message*)

Northwest Indiana Nazarenes, history tells us that God does his most effective work when outward circumstances seem to be the bleakest. Economic circumstances do not diminish His power. An increasingly secular ministry setting should only stoke our passion and vision to make the adjustments necessary to cooperate with His Spirit working in us. His promise is true:

“I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.” So, let’s call on Him, pray to Him, desire to be in his presence, experience his transforming power. And, having been and continuing to be transformed, let’s “Go Make Disciples”, in the power of the Spirit, for the cause of the Kingdom!

*Respectfully submitted,*

LEE WOOLERY