

**District Superintendent's Report to the District Advisory Committee
of the Florida District Church of the Nazarene**
Rev. Dale W. Schaeffer

“Waymaking in the Wilderness”

The year was 1803, President Thomas Jefferson had just completed the Louisiana Purchase. His next step would be to commission the *Corps of Discovery*, under the command of Meriwether Lewis and Second Lieutenant William Clark, to explore “the most direct and practical water communication across the continent for the purpose of commerce.”

Lewis and Clark set out in boats and canoes from St. Charles, Missouri, planning to follow the Missouri River to its principle stream's headwaters and ultimately to the Pacific Ocean. What they did not know was that between the Missouri River and the Pacific stood a significant obstacle.

When the *Corps of Discovery* reached the Continental Divide in the fall of 1805, they expected to find a river that would allow them to paddle easily to the Pacific Ocean. What they were greeted by instead were the Rocky Mountains. Lewis and Clark quickly realized that if they were to complete their mission, they would need to abandon their old means of way-making, and adapt to the reality of the obstacle in front of them. Paddling harder, would be futile.

A similar challenge is facing today's church. The terrain of our world has transitioned, but the church is struggling to adapt. Todd Bolsinger in his book *Canoeing the Mountains* puts it this way, “Today's Christian Leaders were trained for a world that is disappearing.” Society no longer views pastors and religious leaders as authorities on matters pertaining to their communities. Families no longer attend church simply because it's the culturally expected thing to do. And most people, when needing to find answers to spiritual questions, are no longer looking to the church, rather they are looking to Google, popular culture, or their existing relational network.

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were trained for a world
that is disappearing.”*

Simply put, working harder and doing more of what we have been doing for the past 100 years will not produce the missional fruit that God's church has been empowered and commissioned to produce. While our existing methods and models have gotten us to where we are, we know they will not get us to where we must go.

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It only takes a brief look at the statistical summary for the USA/Canada Region of the Church of the Nazarene to see the need for adaptation.

In 2009 there were 659,513 members of the Church of the Nazarene on the USA/Canada Region, but in 2019 there were only 621,278 for a decadal loss of 5.80%. While we are making disciples and receiving new members, an increasing percentage are transferring in from other denominations (a decadal increase of 11.46%) rather than being received by profession of faith (a decadal decrease of -9.47%).

The reality is the same for the Florida District. While it's true that in the past year, we sent 11 churches, 480 attendees, and 835 members from the Florida Panhandle to join the work of the Church of the Nazarene on the now Central Gulf Coast District. It is also true that we've seen a 789 person decrease in worship attendance and a 967 person decrease in membership in the remaining churches on our district.

"We must grieve the loss of what was, in order to take hold of the joy that, with God's help, one day will be."

Like the *Corps of Discovery*, we must leave behind tools that at one time were helpful, but now hold us back from the challenge in front of us. We must build new relationships, learn new tactics, and embrace new pain. We must grieve the loss of what was, in order to take hold of the joy that, with God's help, one day will be.

Fortunately, we are not alone in this effort. Our gracious God who has helped us in the past, is the same God who promises to help us today! Jesus Christ has promised that God's kingdom will advance and that He will ensure that the church is built! And the Holy Spirit, is enlivening God's church, empowering her to fulfill her missional mandate.

I confess, it is a humbling invitation to be called into service and leadership in the church of Jesus Christ. I'm grateful that the Apostle Paul gave us the metaphor of "the body" when speaking of the way that God has "joined us together" to accomplish the Great Commission.

As I reflect on the work of God on the Florida District over the past year, I have profound appreciation for the "members that make up the body" across this wonderful district.

I'm appreciative of my wife, **Steph Schaeffer**, and our daughters, **Brenna** and **Mia**, for embracing a new adventure as we said "yes" to the call of the Lord and the Florida District to join them in fulfilling the Great Commission here in Florida. And I'm doubly appreciative to **Steph** for her willingness to serve alongside me in the District Resource Center as my Administrative Assistant following the resignation of JoAnne Hancock this past fall. Anyone who can work and live with their spouse is worthy of double honor.

To **Renee Boudreaux**, **Julio Brutus**, **Edgar Diaz**, **Mary Egidio**, **Steve Egidio**, **JoAnne Hancock**, **Dave Ramsey**, **Mindy Rickey**, and **Lee Woolery**: I'm grateful for the way you carried an extra load as you welcomed our family, and said goodbye to your friend and co-worker in the gospel **Dr. Larry Dennis** following an incredibly fruitful season of ministry together. You shifted responsibilities, said "yes" to new callings, navigated uncertainty, and embraced a new Superintendent with grace, optimism and passion.

I encourage our District Family to continue to remember **Pastor Julio Brutus** (long serving District Haitian Ministries Coordinator) in their prayers as he continues to recover from a serious stroke suffered in the fall of this past year.

Pastor Edgar Diaz is a missional dynamo in his coordination of the Hispanic Ministries of the district. In the past year, he's helped us to organize four of the district's Hispanic missions: Plant City Hispanic, St. Cloud Camina, Mascotte Casa de Dios, and Lakeland Nuevo Comienzo; welcome a new Hispanic mission in Interlachen; and develop 29 pastors who were recommended for District Minister's Licenses. His passion for developing disciples, pastors, and churches is not only obvious, it is contagious and producing a harvest of Kingdom fruit.

Mary Egidio has kept our office running smoothly through office staff transitions, an office relocation (it should be noted that moving an office 200 feet requires nearly as much effort as moving an office 200 miles), and now through a global pandemic. She truly is the embodiment of "grace under pressure".

Steve Egidio has not only served faithfully and with excellence as our District Secretary, but his willingness to stand in the Ministerial Studies gap left by Pastor Bob Yates' relocation to Tennessee has been a godsend.

JoAnne Hancock scared the life out of me when she gave notice that she was feeling called to a new season of ministry after 6 years in the District Resource Center. Her help in the first months of our family's transition to Florida was a grace of God in our lives, and we are grateful that she's remained "just a phone call away" when questions have arisen.

Dave Ramsey is a once in a generation gift to the District Resource Center. Most districts do not have access to the kind of leadership and property related experience that Dave brings to our team. His work with the District Properties Board lightens the load of our District Advisory Board significantly and brings a level of leadership expertise and excellence that is truly world class.

Mindy Rickey has gone above and beyond in her role as District Treasurer. Not only has she kept the district financials straight, but she has supported dozens of churches through the COVID-19 crisis as they've processed the implications of the CARES Act for their congregation. Her diligence in service to Jesus and His church are truly second-mile.

Lee Woolery has been the epitome of a Barnabas to me personally and to so many across the Florida District. His pastor's heart and experience as a District Superintendent have been an incredible source of encouragement and strength for all of us. His willingness to extend his time of service well beyond his intentions at last year's District Advance is characteristic of the servant's heart he has exhibited throughout his ministry.

My gratitude also extends to our **District Advisory Board** for their great work this year as we tackled some difficult issues, redrew district boundaries, and celebrated great victories. Your quality advice and support has the district well positioned for the work of "Canoeing the Mountains" that lies ahead of us.

We'd be at a loss in serving our district churches if it were not for our **Mission Area Coordinators: Dave Pullen, Nick Lennon, Brad Fink, Peter Migner, Greg Brown, Dwayne Adams, Tim Hancock, Randy Gant, Pat Glenn, and Nick Deford.** These pastors serve not only their own congregations, but they help to support, encourage, and assist the congregations and pastors on each of their mission areas. Their help in providing pastoral care to district pastors, and in coordinating this year's Heart & Soul Tour was a true blessing to myself and to our district family.

A word of special appreciation to our **department heads;**

Hugh King and **Ashok Dhanarajan** have worked to position the district to support our churches with some truly important initiatives. This year, they worked with the District Children's Ministry Council to create a Volunteer District Children's Pastor role, which **Pastor Ryan Martin** has graciously taken on to support local churches in improving their ministry to children and their families. It is an unfortunate reality, that several churches across the district have less than five children in their congregation, with many having none. As a part of this initiative, district ministries funds have been set aside to help local churches with limited children's ministries to revitalize their congregation's ministry to children and families.

Eric Skelton has served our NMI with excellence, and most recently has brought technological innovation to the district's NMI by hosting our first ever "Virtual Deputation Service" with missionaries Scott and Emily Armstrong.

Joey Bocook has led our NYI incredibly well through a challenging year of ministry. This year has seen the cancelation of TNT at TNU and uncertainty surrounding Teen Camp due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through it all, Joey has been a calm and steady presence and we are blessed to have him at the helm of our district's NYI.

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Finally, a huge thank you to **local church pastors and their spouses, staff members, and the laity of the Florida District.** You are the real kingdom difference makers in our communities. The Church of the Nazarene has long held that districts are essential for advancing the missional effectiveness of the church, but while districts are made up of churches, districts are not churches. There truly is no church except the local church.

As St. Teresa of Avila has said, *"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body."* It is through your dedicated service, and surrender to following the leading of the Holy Spirit, that souls are being saved, lives are being transformed, and the kingdom of God is breaking into the brokenness of this world.

"Christ has no body now but yours."

Florida District Strategic Priorities

As we look to the next season of ministry together, I have been asking God through prayer and fasting, and through conferencing with the leaders and churches across our district, “God, what do you dream for us? Where is it You are desiring to lead us?” It’s my joy to share with you a few of the visions that God has been giving me using the Five Strategic Priorities we are developing as a district.

1. Passionate Prayer

Nothing of kingdom significance happens apart from prayer. Not the “let’s all sit around in a circle and share our complaints and body aches” kind of prayer. Not the “let’s all gather in a room and pray until we feel something” kind of prayer. I’m talking about a lifestyle of personal and corporate prayer: rooted in Scripture, attentive to the still small voice of the Spirit, and walked out in bold surrender and daily obedience. I’m talking about the kind of prayer that enables pastors and church leaders to say “no” to the voice of the multitudes, in order to say “yes” the will of the Father.

“Nothing of kingdom significance happens apart from prayer.”

Jesus modeled this kind of prayer for us in Mark’s gospel. The story takes place early in Jesus’ ministry in the city of Capernaum. Jesus is preaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, when in the middle of the service he’s interrupted by a screaming demon possessed man (basically every preacher’s worst nightmare). Incredibly, Jesus is able to bring calm to the chaos inside of the man. As a result the whole town follows Jesus to Peter’s house after worship looking for Jesus to do something to help them. Following a night filled with healing the sick and casting out demons, Jesus falls asleep, and so do several others who were in the “waiting room” hoping that Jesus might heal them as well.

The next morning, Jesus gets up before dawn and travels to a remote hillside to spend dedicated time in prayer, listening to the voice of his Father. Back at the house, his disciples wake up and when they realize Jesus has left the house, they go looking for him. When they find him, Mark tells us this was the exchange that followed:

...when (Simon and his companions) found (Jesus), they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”

Mark 1:36-38 NIV

Jesus’ prayer life enabled him to say “no” to the voice of the multitudes, in order to say “yes” to the purpose and call of his Heavenly Father. “Go to the nearby villages, so you can preach there, that is why I sent you!” I believe the same is true for the church today, but too often the voice of the crowd calls for us to look inward and stay home, while the voice of our Lord calls us to lift our gaze, and to see the harvest fields that are ripe just outside our walls.

The good news is, that just as God desired to speak to Jesus, God desires to speak to us. Just as God sent his one and only Son into the world to save the world, God has sent us into the world as a part of a grand and global mission of rescue and redemption. And if we develop the discipline to still our bodies, seriously reflect on God's word, and listen closely enough, we will hear this call anew and afresh.

My prayer and vision are that every congregation would spend at least two (21 day) dedicated seasons of corporate prayer and fasting each year, and that pastors would equip their congregations to develop a pattern of daily prayer and intercession. I believe the result would be disciples who listen closely to the voice of the Father. Who intercede passionately for the lost and for their community. And who walk boldly in obedience, leaving behind whatever the Spirit calls them to surrender, that they might live into every good work for which they have been created in Christ Jesus.

2. Starting New Churches

I believe that every community deserves a vibrant, healthy, life-giving, multiplying, Spirit-empowered church. Not just any church, but a church that is rooted in an apostolic New Testament ecclesiology, relevant to the culture, responsive to the needs of the community and led by a pastor who is passionate about discipling and equipping the people who live there.

"Every community deserves a vibrant, healthy, life-giving, multiplying, Spirit-empowered church."

One size doesn't fit all. I believe that God works through a variety of church models and cultural contexts. Whether you live in a city, a suburb, or in the country, God's Spirit is at work in every community; and God desires to see every person, in every community, experience the love of God, the life of Christ, and the power of the Spirit.

There are approximately 180 cities with populations of over 3,000 people on the Florida District with no Church of the Nazarene presence, and many with no holiness presence. While churches are engaged in significant kingdom ministry in their own communities, there are nearby communities that are in need of a vibrant holiness witness.

The population on the Florida District currently sits at approximately 11 million people. Estimates show the population growing to between 16-18 million people by the year 2045.

The Florida District is also one of the most diverse districts in the United States. Below is a cultural breakdown of the Florida District:

White: non-Hispanic	6,513,943	Korean	19,998
Hispanic	1,778,043	Pakistani	9,663
Black, non-Hispanic	1,534,203	Japanese	8,056
Asian Indian	93,157	Thai	6,440
Filipino	64,272	Cambodian	5,428
Chinese, except Taiwanese	48,499	Laotian	4,638
Vietnamese	46,608	Burmese	4,314
American Indian	20,924		

When languages that are spoken are considered, the breakdown looks like this:

English	7,988,095	Vietnamese	39,004
Spanish	1,280,265	Chinese (incl. Mandarin)	38,340
French, Haitian, or Cajun	115,653	German	37,677
Russian or other Slavic	45,232	Arabic	35,380
Tagalog (incl. Filipino)	41,079	Korean	13,828

In order to see a holiness presence established in every city on the Florida District we'd need to start 7-8 new churches each year for the next 25 years. When population growth and ethnic diversity are factored in, we'd need to start 11-12 churches each year to accomplish this goal, while also keeping up with population growth. The results of this would be approximately 300 churches discipling at least 30,000 people each year.

What's incredible is that this kind of growth amounts to only a 2% annual growth rate!

The early church grew at approximately a 3% annual growth rate.

Often, we think of big impact coming from massive exponential growth.

The truth is that if we simply reach people at 2/3rds the rate of the early church we would have an incredible kingdom impact.

My prayer and vision are that every church would lift their eyes and prioritize being involved in some way helping to support the starting of a new church annually. This might be by prioritizing a percentage of each year's budget, Missions offering, or Christmas offering towards church planting by partnering with a church planter on the Florida District. It might be by sending a key family to be a part of a new church start. It might be by sponsoring a staff member or lay leader to start a Fresh Expression of church in their workplace, home or neighborhood. It might be by launching a new campus or dinner church in a nearby town. But if each and every church on the Florida District prioritized being involved in a new church start annually, it would not take us 25 years to see a holiness presence in each and every town on the Florida District.

3. Strengthen Existing Churches

I want to go on record by saying, *"I believe that every church on the Florida District can be a vibrant, healthy, life-giving, multiplying, Spirit-led church."* We have seen examples of it across the district. In fact, over the past year, six of our churches (Clearwater First, Spring Hill Calvary, Lake City, St. John's Faith Community, Lake Gibson Church and Winter Garden Faith Family Community) have invested funds in working with Steve Smith and Church Equippers Ministries to build revitalizations teams.

"I believe that every church on the Florida District can be a vibrant, healthy, life-giving, multiplying, Spirit-led church."

One area of revitalization that is essential is making room in our churches and ministry budgets for the next generation. Children, Youth and Family Ministries must be a priority for a church that is desiring to be revitalized. As I shared earlier, our District Children's Ministry Council has invested a portion of their budget in resourcing churches with limited or no children's ministries, and Ryan Martin, Florida District Children's Pastor is waiting and ready to assist congregations in creating a strategy to reach the children and families in their community.

This past fall, we hosted two Pastor's Training Days, one in Gainesville and one in Winter Garden, over 140 pastors attended these two trainings. The goal of these training days was to equip pastors and leadership teams to create a mission focused annual ministry action plan that would guide the ministry of their church each year. Don't worry if you missed it, we'll be providing this training annually. In 24 years of ministry, I have yet to see a church that operates from a prayerfully developed, faithfully executed, and evangelistically focused ministry action plan report zeroes on an Annual Pastor's Report.

My prayer and vision are that every pastor will work with their church board to evaluate the current ministries of their church, and to create a prayerfully developed, faithfully executed, evangelistically focused ministry action plan each year.

4. Intentional Leadership Development

Our greatest asset as a district is not our location, although Florida is a great place to live. Our greatest asset as a district is not our buildings, in fact sometimes buildings can become a barrier to effective ministry. Our greatest asset as a district isn't even our strong finances, in fact sometimes we can find ourselves trusting in the balance of a bank account more than we trust God. No, the greatest asset of our district is our people.

“The greatest asset of our district is our people.”

I believe there are leaders in every church on our district, many waiting to be unleashed into their kingdom calling. When I pastored in Medford, we had an amazing worship leader who led worship every single weekend. One day I asked him, “Trevor, why is it that you're the only person who ever gets to lead a song in worship?” I will never forget Trevor's response. He began to cry and said, “I've always wanted to develop others, but I'd never been allowed to let anyone else lead. I was told I was paid to sing and that that was my job.” It was a pointed question to be sure, but there was no doubt in my spirit that God doesn't call pastors to sing songs, he calls pastors to equip and develop the people of God. Fast forward to today, and Trevor has developed dozens of young and not so young leaders, some who are leading worship, others who are leading student and children's ministries and still others who are serving outside the walls of the church each week.

I challenge every pastor to develop an “ICNU (I SEE IN YOU) culture”. A culture where we keep our eyes open to the gifts that God has placed in the people of God in each of our local churches. Look for leaders to raise up. Share with them the gifts that you see God has given them. Give them opportunity to lead; then support, encourage and equip them as they do. Leaders are all around us, we just have to open up our eyes to see them.

My prayer and my vision are that every pastor would raise up at least one leader who God could use to multiply the ministry and mission of the church every single year. To paraphrase Andy Stanley, “Your greatest contribution to the kingdom of God might not be something you do, it might be someone you raise.”

5. Unleashing Compassion

Recently I heard a famous Christian leader say, “We live in a world where the in thing to do is to be critical and cynical about Christians.” And honestly, we Christians have been giving our critics a fair amount of ammunition. While it’s true that we always need to be ready to give a response for the hope that we have in Christ, I’m concerned that when the church argues back with society, we don’t really get very far.

“When we are able to say, ‘Our passion is to serve the poor and forgotten.’...that’s something you simply cannot argue with.”

But when we are able to say, “Our passion is to serve the poor and forgotten, to help those who are unable to help themselves, and to elevate the voices of those who have been silenced.”, well that’s something you simply cannot argue with.

“Compassion is the true apologetic of our day.” I’m convinced that in a culture that is skeptical of religion and distrusting of Christians, compassion is the true apologetic of our day.

I believe that God is calling us to:

- Tell the stories of churches who are engaging in compassionate ministries.
- Provide training and resourcing that assists churches in developing missional compassionate ministries within their communities.
- Encourage churches to engage in compassion and develop leaders who will launch compassionate Fresh Expressions of the church.
- To launch three Hubs of Compassion over the next decade in the strategic city-centers of Jacksonville, Orlando, and Tampa. These would become resource centers and start-up incubators; providing worship space, office space, meeting space and start-up support to church plants, compassionate ministries, missional communities, house churches, and other Fresh Expressions of church.

My prayer and vision are that each church would build into its annual ministry action plan at least one avenue for missional compassionate outreach each year.

As challenging as the journey ahead of us will be, and as rugged as the terrain before us is likely to become, the future looks bright for the work of the Church of the Nazarene on the Florida District. In the days ahead we will not be satisfied to be content with the status quo. No, we will scatter new seeds. Dig new wells. And put down new roots. We will innovate, adapt, and overcome. We will set aside structures and forms that at one time served us well, but that today have become encumbrances to our missional mandate. We will lift our eyes, fix our focus, and we will pray for our gracious God to strengthen our hands for the work of the harvest that is before us.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Dale W. Schaeffer
District Superintendent
Florida District Church of the Nazarene