

## CHURCH GROWTH (AND DECLINE) DURING THE 1989 ASSEMBLY YEAR

During the year between the 1988 and 1989 District Assemblies, 15.0% (775) of the Nazarene congregations in the United States and Canada experienced a gain in membership of more than 10%. Another 21.3% (1,102) of these churches gained from 3% through 10%. 691 (13.3%) churches experience net gain of less than 3%. An annual gain of 3% would result in more than a 30% gain over a decade.

Half (49.6%) of the Nazarene churches in the United States and Canada had net gains in membership in 1989. Another 15.4% (797) were stable, experiencing neither gain nor loss.

On the other hand, 35.0% (1,814) of the churches experienced a net membership loss. One in ten (10.7%; 552) of the churches lost more than 10%. About one in seven (15.1%; 781) lost from 3% through 10%. Another 9.3% (481) experienced a net loss of 3% or less. These patterns are summarized in table 1.

Table 1

Growth and Decline in Membership, Sunday School,  
and Sunday Morning Worship During 1989 in the Congregations  
of the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada

Rate of Change	Membership		Sunday School		A.M. Worship	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
More than 10% Gain	775	15.0	1089	21.6	1044	20.8
3% to 10% Gain	1102	21.2	722	14.3	799	15.9
0 to 3% Gain	691	13.3	280	5.6	327	6.5
No Change	797	15.4	348	6.9	394	7.8
0 to 3% Loss	481	9.3	279	5.5	313	6.2
3% to 10% Loss	781	15.1	931	18.5	904	18.0
More than 10% Loss	552	10.7	1389	27.6	1246	24.8
	5283*	100.0	5038*	100.0	5027*	100.0

\*Churches without both beginning and ending data were excluded from growth calculations

Growth measured by participation in Sunday School and Sunday morning worship services is also reported in table 1. When compared with membership change, both of these measures show higher proportions of the congregations experiencing gains of more than 10%. While 15% had membership increases greater than 10%, about 21% had gains this large in Sunday School and in Sunday morning worship. Compared with the half (49.6%) of the churches which had net gains in membership during the year, 41.5% had net gains in Sunday School attendance and 43.2% gained in Sunday morning worship.

Of course patterns of gains and losses during one year may be somewhat misleading. An unusual year might result either in unnecessary alarm or in unwarranted sense of well-being. Therefore, it is probably important to compare the pattern of 1989 with the pattern of a longer period. Table 2

summarizes these measures of growth for the ten years from 1980 through 1989,

Table 2

Growth and Decline in Membership, Sunday School,  
and Sunday Morning Worship During 1980-1989 in the  
Congregations of the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada

Rate of Change	Membership		Sunday School		A.M. Worship	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
More than 10% Gain	2161	46.4	1316	28.5	1580	34.3
3% to 10% Gain	411	8.8	259	5.6	272	5.9
0 to 3% Gain	123	2.6	99	2.1	101	2.2
No Change	92	2.0	85	1.8	82	1.8
0 to 3% Loss	123	2.6	93	2.0	116	2.5
3% to 10% Loss	389	8.4	347	7.6	362	7.8
More than 10% Loss	1362	29.2	2425	52.4	2100	45.5
	4661*	100.0	4624*	100.0	4613*	100.0

\*Churches without both beginning and ending data were excluded from growth calculations

A majority (57.8%) of the Nazarene churches in the United States and Canada had a net gain in membership during the decade. Two out of five (42.3%) gained in Sunday morning worship attendance, and almost as many (36.2%) experienced a net gain in Sunday School attendance.

The good news of the growing churches presents grounds for rejoicing. However, the relatively high number of churches which appear to be declining or struggling gives cause for concern. A majority of the churches experienced net losses in Sunday morning attendance (55.9%) and in Sunday School (62.0%). Many of these congregations had losses greater than 10%.

This raises the question addressed in the following notes: What is correlated with membership growth in Nazarene congregations? What program options, of those reported in the annual report of the pastor to the denomination, make growth more likely? Do increases in pastoral calls, revivals, or proportion of members trained in personal evangelism have a direct, measurable relationship to the growth of a church.

John Wesley asked a similar question. In "The Large Minutes" he wrote, "Ought we not diligently to observe in what places God is pleased at any time to pour out His Spirit more abundantly?" His answer was, "We ought: and at that time to send more laborers than usual into that part of the harvest." (The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. 1872. Vol. VIII. London: Wesleyan Conference Office. Pages 300-301). To expand his question slightly, we might ask, Ought we not diligently to observe on what programs, or ministry efforts, God is pleased at any time to pour out His Spirit more abundantly?

The first step in seeking a more complete understanding of what God has been blessing was this analysis of the data which was most extensive and

immediately available: the annual reports of the pastors. Pastors' report information for all congregations in the United States and Canada for 1989, the latest year for which data from all districts was available, were analyzed to examine relationships between pastoral calls, number of revivals, and proportion of members trained in personal evangelism and rate of growth, rate of professions of faith, size of congregation, Sunday school attendance, and Sunday morning worship attendance. The following notes summarize the findings of that analysis.

#### NOTES ON METHOD

Pearson's correlation coefficients (Pearson's "r") were calculated as a measure of association in this analysis. Measures of association indicate a tendency for one characteristic (or variable) to vary in connection with another characteristic (variable). Pearson's "r" values may range from zero (0) to one (1). A coefficient of one would indicate a perfect correlation which whenever one variable increased the other variable also increased in the same amount. A coefficient of zero would mean there was no relationship between the two variables.

The size of the coefficient indicates the strength of the tendency. The correlations below (e.g.,  $r = .120$ ) are nearer to zero than they are to one and are therefore understood to indicate a weak relationship, or a weak tendency to co-vary. A more precise indication of the strength of the relationship can be found by squaring Pearson's "r." This squared value is the percentage of the variance in one variable explained by the variation found in the other variable (e.g.,  $.120 \times .120 = .014$ , or 1.4%).

A negative coefficient, such as the one between congregation size and pastoral calls per member, would mean the two characteristics tended to vary in opposite directions, as one increased the other decreased. A positive coefficient, such as the one between growth and calls, indicates that as one variable increased, the other variable also tended to increase.

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients between  
Congregational Activities and Other  
Characteristics of Nazarene Churches  
in the United States and Canada During 1989

Growth Factor	Pastoral Calls Per Member	Number of 1989 Revivals	Proportion Trained in Personal Evangelism
Rate of Membership Change	.120 (5179)	.075 (5179)	.195 (5179)
Rate of Professions of Faith	.144 (5179)	.037 (5179)	.285 (5179)
Number	-.153	.091	-.056

of Members	(5179)	(5283)	(5179)
Sunday School	-.133	.111	-.042
Ave. Attendance	(5179)	(5283)	(5179)
Sunday A.M. Worship	-.132	.091	-.035
Ave. Attendance	(5179)	(5283)	(5179)
(Coefficient / (Cases) )			

In table 3 the numbers in parentheses are the number of churches in the calculation. If data were not available for both of the variables in the calculation, the church was excluded from that analysis.

#### PASTORAL CALLS

The ANNUAL REPORT of PASTOR to the DISTRICT ASSEMBLY asks each pastor to report "Number pastoral calls made this year." The definition of a "pastoral call" may vary from pastor to pastor. This presents a problem for the interpretation of relationships between calls and growth. If some pastors define it one way and others define it another, comparisons of their reports are no doubt misleading.

For example, if one pastor reports all telephone contacts as well as in-home visits while another reports only in-home visits, one may appear to be devoting much more attention to calling while in fact their activities may be very similar. If, then, our analysis asked whether there was greater growth where more calls were reported, we would be likely to find no relationship between growth and calls reported. That is, the pastors in our example were not different in their actual calling activities. Their reporting differed, not their practice. Since actual ministry, rather than differences in reporting, has the potential to influence growth, no relationship would be found. Therefore, caution should be exercised when drawing conclusions regarding pastoral calls.

No relationship was found between the actual number of calls reported and membership growth or decline. However, when the size of congregation was taken into account, a relationship was found. Effects of differences in sizes of congregations were controlled by dividing the number of calls in each church by the number of members. This calculation resulted in the number of calls per member for each church. There was a positive relationship between pastoral calls per member in 1989 and rate of growth or decline during the year ( $r = .120$  or 1.4%). The more pastoral visits for each member, the greater the growth in membership.

There were very weak, negative correlations between measures of congregation size and calls per member. Three measures of church size were included in the analysis. The larger the membership ( $r = -.153$ ), the Sunday school average attendance ( $r = -.133$ ), or the Sunday morning worship attendance average ( $r = -.132$ ), the fewer calls reported per member.

There was a very weak, positive correlation between number of pastoral calls per member reported in 1989 and rate of additions by professions of

faith during the year ( $r = .144$ ). Churches reporting a higher number of pastoral calls per member tend very slightly to have experienced higher numbers of professions of faith per member.

#### REVIVALS

The ANNUAL REPORT of PASTOR to the DISTRICT ASSEMBLY also asks pastors report "Number revival campaigns (in your church)." During the 1989 assembly year 6.4% (339) of the Nazarene congregations in the United States and Canada reported three or more revival campaigns in their church. Another 37.1% (1961) reported two campaigns. Just under one-third (31.6%; 1668) of the churches reported one revival during 1989. 24.9% (1,315) reported no revival held.

Revival campaigns vary a great deal in their duration and character. However, these characteristics are not reported on the annual report. Therefore, caution in interpretation is again necessary.

The relationship between number of revivals and rate of growth was so weak ( $r = .075$ ) that it would be accurate to say that overall in the United States and Canada in 1989 there was virtually no relationship between number of revivals reported and rate of growth. There was a similar, very weak, positive relationship between congregation size and number of revivals held during 1989. Churches with larger memberships ( $r = .091$ ) Sunday school attendance ( $r = .111$ ), or Sunday morning worship attendance ( $r = .091$ ) tended very slightly to report more revivals during the year.

#### PERSONAL EVANGELISM

The ANNUAL REPORT of PASTOR to the DISTRICT ASSEMBLY asks pastors to report "Number persons trained in personal evangelism." A proportion of members trained was calculated in order to examine the effect of personal evangelists on church growth without the confounding variable of congregation size.

There was a very weak, positive relationship between proportion of members trained in personal evangelism and rate of growth during 1989 ( $r = .195$ ). Churches with higher proportions of members trained tended very slightly to experience better rates of membership growth. There was a slightly stronger, positive correlation between proportion of personal evangelists and rate of professions of faith ( $r = .285$ ).

These correlations are similar to those found between the same variable in 1987, but stronger than those found in 1986 and 1988. This fluctuation from year to year suggests that the measure of personal evangelism training is not reliable.

The relationships between proportion of members trained in personal evangelism and measures of size were so weak that it may be concluded that proportion of members with this training was not influenced by membership size.

#### TYPES OF CONGREGATIONAL GROWTH AND DECLINE

Relationships between growth and pastoral calls, revivals, and members

trained in personal evangelism were examined in the preceding sections. This section examines relationships between various types of membership gains and losses and overall rates of growth or decline.

The growth and decline of any population is controlled by birth, death, and migration. The membership of a church increases or declines based on the combination of these three factors. Birth additions to the population are easily understood in the language of the church. New converts, experiencing the new birth, are added to the congregation by professions of their faith. Profession of faith additions may include the children of members (biological growth), reaffiliations of former members who are returning to their church after a period of backsliding, or new converts from the relatively large percentage of the population who are unchurched (conversion growth). Unfortunately, denominational reports do not distinguish between these types of new birth growth.

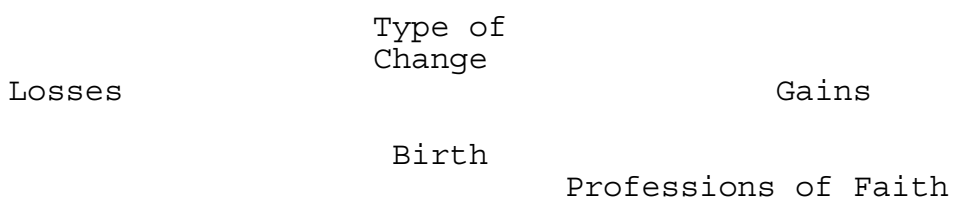
Death attritions are also easily translated into the language of the church. Physical deaths in the congregation are recorded as losses by death. Spiritual deaths are sometimes recorded as losses by removal, although it appears backslidden members are rarely officially removed if they maintain even weak relationships with active members.

Migration both increases and decreases congregational memberships. Migratory increases may take the form of transfers from other denominations or transfers from other Nazarene congregations. Similarly, losses may be transfers to other Nazarene congregations or transfers to other denominations by means of a commendation or release. Loss by transfer from one Nazarene congregation are not always accompanied by transfer gains in another Nazarene congregation. Nazarene congregations in the United States and Canada annually report approximately one thousand more losses by transfer than the corresponding gains by transfer. During the 1989 assembly year 16,789 members transferred away from Nazarene churches while only 14,922 transferred in. This made a net disappearance of 1,867 members. If members carried their membership with them when they moved, this might be understandable. However, this is not the normal Nazarene procedure. Therefore, it appears that in many of these cases members were transferred out of one Nazarene congregation and received by profession of faith into the other congregation.

The three factors of births, deaths, and migration as they affect the membership of Nazarene congregations might be summarized in a diagram as in figure 1.

Figure 1

Gains and Losses in Nazarene Congregations



		(Children of Members)
		(Former Members)
		(Unchurched/Pagan Pool)
	Death	
Physical Deaths		
Removals		
Some Releases		
	Migration	
Nazarene Transfers		Nazarene Transfers
Denominational Transfers		(Some Professions of Faith)
(Commendations)		Denominational Transfers
(Some Releases)		

In table 4 correlation coefficients between these types of addition and attrition are presented. Attritions by death are excluded from the table since these losses are largely beyond the control of the congregation and are only weakly correlated with any of the other types of gains and losses. To permit comparison of churches of various sizes, rates of addition and attrition were calculated by dividing the number reported in each church by the beginning membership in that church. Correlations between the overall rate of membership growth or decline (rate of membership change) and rates specific types of addition and attrition are included in the table.

Table 4

Correlation Coefficients between Various Types of Growth and Decline in Nazarene Churches in the United States and Canada During 1988

	Rate of Member- ship Change	Rate of Profes- sions of Faith	Rate of Denomin- ational Transfers	Rate of Nazarene Transfers In	Rate of Removals, Releases Etc.	Rate of Nazaren Transfe Out
Rate of Member- ship Change		.631 (5179)	.146 (5179)	.458 (5179)	-.413 (5179)	-.495 (5179)
Rate of Profes- sions of Faith	.631 (5179)		.077 (5179)	.277 (5179)	.064 (5179)	-.014 (5179)
Rate of Denomin- ational Transfers	.146 (5179)	.077 (5179)		.006 (5179)	.084 (5179)	.009 (5179)
Rate of Nazarene Transfers in	.458 (5179)	.277 (5179)	.006 (5179)		.044 (5179)	.093 (5179)
Rate of Removals, Releases, etc.	-.413 (5179)	.064 (5179)	.084 (5179)	.044 (5179)		.024 (5179)
Rate of Nazarene Transfers out	-.495 (5179)	.014 (5179)	.009 (5179)	.093 (5179)	.024 (5179)	

(Coefficient / (Cases) )

There was a strong, positive relationship between rate of professions of faith in 1989 and rate of growth or decline during the year ( $r = .631$ ). Growth was most strongly affected by professions of faith. Churches which added by profession of faith tended strongly to experience better rates of membership growth. In general it might be said that 39.8% of the variation found in growth could be explained by differences in additions by professions of faith. However, Pearson's correlation coefficients do not eliminate the interaction of variables. Therefore, some of the relationship between these two variables is no doubt the indirect effect of other variables.

There was a strong, positive relationship between rate of additions by transfer from other Nazarene churches and rate of growth ( $r = .458$ ). There was a similarly strong, but negative, correlation between rate of attrition by Nazarene transfer and rate of growth ( $r = -.495$ ). Growing churches tend rather strongly to be churches which are receiving more, and losing fewer, Nazarenes by transfer. This relationship was not as strong as that between professions of faith and growth. Therefore, it might be concluded that additions by profession of faith are a stronger factor in growth than are additions by Nazarene transfer, although transfers are also very important factors.

There was a weak, positive correlation between rate of additions by transfer from other denominations and rate of growth ( $r = .146$ ). This was weaker than the correlation found in previous years.

There was a strong, negative relationship between rate of removal, commendation, or release and rate of growth ( $r = -.413$ ). The negative coefficient suggests a tendency for rate of growth to decline as rate of removals increased.

It has been theorized from time to time that removals should be strongly correlated with professions of faith since many churches do their best to report losses by removal only when they have offsetting professions of faith. However, this theory has not been supported by the data for 1986, 1987, 1988, or 1989. If the explanation were accurate, the correlation between the two factors would be expected to be strongest in any single year and weakest over several years. However, the relationship between these two factors is so weak (.064) in 1989 that it is virtually non-existent.

This does not mean a relationship between rate of additions by profession of faith and rate of attrition by removal, commendation, or release is non-existent. In fact, other studies have consistently found a high correlation between the rate of gains by professions of faith and the rate of losses by removals when several years are analyzed together. This pattern of strength over several years but weakness in any single year might result from either of two conflicting factors. First, it might be that premature professions of faith result in removals when real assimilation into the group does not occur. Or it may be that churches serious enough about membership to remove members also tend to be serious about evangelism which brings new members into the fellowship.

## CONCLUSION

In 1989 the proportion of pastoral calls to the size of the congregation was related to the growth of the church. Churches whose pastors, or pastor staffs, reported more calls per member were very slightly more likely to grow.

The mere number of revivals held and the rate of growth were virtually unrelated when all congregations in the United States and Canada were considered together. However, differences in the character of the revivals held no doubt were related to growth. Further research regarding the length and the nature of the revivals held, as well as regional factors, would be necessary before drawing firm conclusions about the relationship between revivals and church growth.

There was a weak relationship between the proportion of members trained in personal evangelism and the rate of membership growth. There was also a weak relationship between the proportion of members trained in personal evangelism and the rate of professions of faith during the 1989 assembly year.

The type of congregational membership addition or attrition most influential in Nazarene growth appears to be growth by professions of faith. Losses by transfer to other Nazarene congregations and gains by Nazarene transfers were also strong factors in growth. Losses by removal, commendation, release, or transfer was also a strong factor affecting growth or decline.

The analysis summarized here provides a limited, preliminary observation of the programs, or ministry efforts, on which God is pleased in these times to pour out His Spirit more abundantly. The information from the pastors' reports is not adequate to fully examine the effects of pastoral calling, revival evangelism, or personal evangelism ministries on the growth of congregations in the Church of the Nazarene. Therefore, a more extensive study of these and other forms of ministry using a representative sample of churches is needed.

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