

Cultivating Community in a Diverse Denomination

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The Church of the Nazarene in the United States is characterized by diversity. While there are important segments of the American population that are not well served by the denomination, Nazarenes are similar to the larger population in such characteristics as age, gender, and education.

As the church cultivates community, there are two major challenges in the area of diversity. First, the great commission compels us to increase diversity in the denomination. Our borders must always be extended. The gospel must be effectively communicated and ministry provided to cultural groups we are not now serving. Second, we have the challenge of recognizing, rejoicing in, and effectively ministering to the diversity that exists among us. Cultural differences between groups within the church enrich us. We must resist ethnocentric tendencies to assume that the body of Christ does not need all of its parts (I Corinthians 12: 21-24).

Data

In their book *One Nation Under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society*, Barry A. Kosmin and Seymour P. Lachman present the results of a national survey of religious identification. From April of 1989 through April of 1990 this study was conducted for the City University of New York by the ICR Survey Research Group of Media, Pennsylvania, as part of their omnibus market research (EXCEL) survey. Telephone interviews with 113,000 American households in the continental United States were conducted at various times of day, with some bias toward evening interviews. If the call was not answered on the first attempt, up to three additional attempts were made during a four-day period. In order to obtain random responses within households, interviewers asked to speak with the person eighteen years or older whose birthday was most recent.

The primary question in the study was, "What is your religion?" The sample used in the study was so large that the relatively small percentage of Americans who are Nazarenes are represented in a large enough number for analysis on their own. Those 385 respondents who identified themselves as Nazarene are the subjects of this report. The socio-demographic questions that were asked of all respondents permit the construction of a portrait of the people who call themselves Nazarenes. At the 95% confidence level, the margin of error for a sample this size would be 5% for proportions in the middle range.

This study did not address all of the diversity issues of interest to this conference. Furthermore, in the ten years since it was conducted some changes have undoubtedly taken place in the church. Therefore, some data from the General Secretary's records and some ANSR Poll data have been included here.

Existing Diversity

There is considerable diversity in the Church of the Nazarene in the United States. This diversity presents particular opportunities and challenges for ministry.

Age

While some have worried that Nazarenes are an aging denomination out of touch with younger Americans, the One Nation Under God study suggests that we tend to be younger than the larger society. The youngest category in the study, 18 – 25 years old in 1990, is “Generation X”. Kosmin and Lachman found nearly as high a proportion of Nazarenes in this age group as they found in the larger population. This may be especially significant since the Xers were then at an age when Americans are particularly likely to withdraw from the church, at least temporarily.

The greatest discrepancy between the Nazarene and the American age distributions was in the over 65 category.

There may be a few Nazarene congregations serving only one age group. However, it seems likely that most congregations are diverse in terms of age. Table 1 suggests that our churches are doing fairly well in reaching the various age groups younger than 65. However, we may be experiencing some difficulty in reaching or retaining older people.

Table 1
Age Distribution

	Adult Americans	Adult Nazarenes
18 through 25	16.90%	16.20%
26 through 45	41.90%	48.20%
46 through 65	21.10%	26.40%
Over 65	20.10%	9.20%

Education

About one in six (16.4%) Nazarenes have graduated from college, with some (3.9%) of these going on to graduate school.

However, in spite of an impressive network of colleges, most adult members have not attended college. High school graduation is the highest level of formal education completed for about six out of ten (57%) adult Americans. This proportion appears to be slightly higher (65%) among Nazarene adults.

While there is undoubtedly some educational diversity within congregations, it seems likely that there is also considerable variation between churches. Some Nazarene congregations are probably made up mostly of college educated professionals. Other

Nazarene churches are probably located in what Tex Sample might describe as the oral culture.

Table 2
Formal Education

	Adult Americans	Adult Nazarenes
Less than High School	21.40%	20.00%
High School Graduate	35.60%	44.70%
Technical School	1.70%	0.50%
Some College	21.10%	17.10%
College Graduate	13.80%	2.50%
Graduate School or more	5.90%	3.90%

Totals do not equal 100% since some did not answer the question

Income

The Nazarene household income distribution is similar to the national distribution. If there is a bias, it appears that we have been more successful in ministry to lower income groups.

Almost half (48%) of the adult Nazarenes appear to have total annual household incomes of under \$25,000. This is a higher proportion than found in the total population (42.3%), and the difference is probably statistically significant since the margin of sampling error (5%) with a proportion of 48%, and a sample of 385, is less than the difference between Nazarenes and the population. The margin of error in the total sample of 113,000 is very small (0.2%).

Table 3
Before Taxes Total Annual Household Income From All Sources

Family Income	Adult Americans	Adult Nazarenes
Less than \$10,000	13.50%	14.00%
\$10,000 but less than \$15,000	9.40%	10.10%
\$15,000 but less than \$20,000	9.70%	13.00%
\$20,000 but less than \$25,000	9.70%	10.90%
\$25,000 but less than \$30,000	9.40%	10.10%
\$30,000 but less than \$40,000	12.10%	16.40%
\$40,000 but less than \$50,000	8.50%	8.60%
\$50,000 but less than \$75,000	8.90%	4.70%
\$75,000 and over	4.80%	1.30%

Totals do not equal 100% since some people did not respond

Employment

Half of the Nazarene adults are employed full-time. Nazarene employment patterns are very similar to those found in the total population.

Table 4
Employment Status:
“Currently, are you yourself employed full-time, part-time, or not at all?”

	Adult Americans	Adult Nazarenes
Employed, full-time	52.60%	50.10%
Employed, part-time	11.70%	15.90%
Retired	17.30%	15.30%
Housewife	9.00%	12.50%
Student	3.00%	1.00%
Temporarily Unemployed	4.30%	3.10%
Totals do not equal 100% since some respondents did not answer		

Political Identification

In the One Nation Under God study, Nazarenes were more likely to identify themselves politically as Republican (42%) than either Democrat (29%) or Independent (25%). A more recent ANSR Poll found a much higher proportion of Nazarenes identifying themselves as Republican. In fact, on the May 1995 ANSR Poll 71 % of active, adult members said they think of themselves as Republican.

This discrepancy in the findings of the two studies might just be the result of measurement error. However, if both studies were accurate, the difference between the two might be the result of a change in political affiliation during the 1990s. Nazarenes who formerly were democrats may have become republicans.

Another possibility may be a difference between the two samples. The Kosmin and Lachman study identified people who call themselves “Nazarene” when asked “What is your religion?” This might include non-members who think of themselves as Nazarenes. The ANSR Poll sample was active members. If this is the source of the discrepancy, it would suggest that non-Republicans may feel comfortable enough to participate in the Nazarene church, but may somehow not feel comfortable enough to join the membership. This might suggest a failure to cultivate community in the midst of our diversity.

Table 5
Political Party Identification

	Adult Americans	Adult Nazarenes
Republican	29.00%	41.80%
Democrat	35.00%	28.60%
Independent	29.10%	24.90%

Totals do not equal 100% since some people did not identify with any of these groups

Extending the Diversity

Looking at data collected by the General Secretary's Office and the Evangelism & Church Growth Division, it becomes obvious that there are a few areas where the diversity of the denomination needs to be extended. One such area is the cultural distribution of our churches.

Nazarene Churches

The Evangelism & Church Growth Division tracks the predominant cultural group of Churches of the Nazarene in the USA. The current distribution is shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Predominant Church Culture
(1999 Active, Organized Churches)

	# of Churches	% of Churches
White/English	4,205	88.10%
Hispanic	193	4.00%
Multicultural	94	2.00%
African American	88	1.80%
Haitian	45	0.90%
American Indian	41	0.90%
Korean	38	0.80%
15 Other Groups	68	1.40%
Total	4,772	99.90%

Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding

Although there are currently 22 different cultural groups represented within USA Nazarene churches, the overwhelming majority (88%) of our churches are white/English-speaking. This is actually an improvement from where the denomination started the decade. In 1990, white/English-speaking churches represented 92% of USA Nazarene churches.

We can compare these figures to the USA population by computing the number of worshipers within our churches. In 1990, 93.5% of worshipers were in predominantly white/English-speaking churches. By 1999 this percentage had decreased to 90.9%. This compares to the 1990 USA population of 75.7% white/non-Hispanic, and the 1999 population estimate of 71.9% white/non-Hispanic. Although we are slowly becoming more diverse, this comparison to the population suggests that we still have a long way to go in our efforts to effectively disciple all the nations within our Nation.

Two trends are contributing to this slow, but steadily increasing diversity. The first is that we are closing a lot of our older, predominantly white/English-speaking churches. In the decade of the 1990s, the USA Church of the Nazarene disorganized 342 white/English-speaking churches, and organized only 208 a net loss of 134 churches (see Table 7). The declining number of white/English-speaking churches has helped increase the percentage of churches that are predominantly multicultural. While this may help the denomination

look more diversified, it is an unnecessary, even hurtful, trend. We should be able to increase the number of our white/English-speaking churches as well as the number (and percentage) of other multicultural churches. What is needed is effective evangelism among all cultural groups in the USA.

Table 7
White/English Churches
(Organizations and
Disorganizations)

	Churches Disorganized	Churches Organized	Net Gain/Loss
1990	37	38	1
1991	30	21	-9
1992	47	22	-25
1993	32	27	-5
1994	30	22	-8
1995	39	13	-26
1996	20	15	-5
1997	31	13	-18
1998	46	18	-28
1999	30	19	-11
Total	342	208	-134

The second trend contributing to the increased diversity of our churches in the USA is that an increasing percentage of our newly organized churches are multicultural. Over the past 20 years 42% of the new churches organized have been non-English-speaking white. This figure increases to 50% if we only consider the decade of the 1990s. In fact, in 4 of the last 5 years there have been more multicultural churches organized than there have been white/English-speaking churches (see Table 8). The bad news is that the denomination actually organized more multicultural churches in the 1980s (232) than it did during the 1990s (209). It is unfortunate to have to report that our increasing diversity is not because we have become more effective in reaching multicultural groups, but because we have become less effective in reaching the non-Hispanic white culture.

Table 8
Newly Organized Churches
(White/English-speaking vs.
Multicultural)

	White/English– Speaking	Multi– Cultural	%Multi– Cultural
1980	38	12	24.00%
1981	36	23	39.00%
1982	42	10	19.20%
1983	34	19	35.80%
1984	46	32	41.00%
1985	33	15	31.30%
1986	38	20	34.50%
1987	51	29	36.30%
1988	30	43	58.90%
1989	44	29	39.70%
1990	38	24	38.70%
1991	21	23	52.30%
1992	22	19	46.30%
1993	27	27	50.00%
1994	22	16	42.10%
1995	13	27	67.50%
1996	15	17	53.10%
1997	13	22	62.90%
1998	18	19	51.40%
1999	19	15	44.10%
Total	600	441	42.40%

Ministerial Workforce

Another area where the denomination’s diversity should be extended is in its ministerial workforce. Since we have already discovered that approximately 91% of our worshipers are non-Hispanic whites, it should not surprise us if we found that the large majority of our ministerial workforce reflects this distribution. Unfortunately, we can only look around the room or recall our own experiences to test this hypothesis because racial/ethnic data is not kept on the General Secretary’s records for clergy. (Although my own experience suggests that a figure of 91% of our clergy being non-Hispanic white is probably too low.) However, the General Secretary’s records do provide the gender of our clergy, and the data suggest that we could easily extend the gender diversity of our denomination’s ministerial workforce.

Table 9 shows the current breakdown of ministerial roles and the gender diversity within each role. While it is well established that women make up the majority of worshipers, they do not seem to be sufficiently represented within the denomination’s ministerial workforce. The data shows that only 8.4% of our clergy are women. By far the largest number of clergy have a pastoral role, but only 2.8% of our pastors are

women. No women are represented in the roles of General Superintendent, District Superintendent, or Tenured Evangelist.

Table 9
Ministerial Roles by Gender
(USA Active, Licensed of Ordained
Clergy on Sept. 3, 1999)

Role	#of Females	# of Males	Total	% Female
Chaplain	19	184	203	9.40%
Christian Educ.	10	6	16	62.50%
District Assign.	5	72	77	6.50%
District Supt.	0	78	78	0.00%
Educator	14	199	213	6.60%
Evangelist, Comm	2	60	62	3.20%
Evangelist, Reg.	17	174	191	8.90%
Evangelist, tenured	0	21	21	0.00%
General Assignment	8	85	93	8.60%
General Supt.	0	6	6	0.00%
Missionary	24	141	165	14.50%
NoAssignment	207	1,564	1,771	11.70%
Pastor	121	4,262	4,383	2.80%
Pastoral Service	256	1,188	1,444	17.70%
Song Evangelist, Comm	2	2	4	50.00%
Song Evangelist, Reg	4	7	11	36.40%
Special Service	16	168	184	8.70%
Student	82	424	506	16.20%
Transferring	18	138	156	11.50%
Total	805	8,779	9,584	8.40%

What is troubling is that the ministerial workforce used to be more diverse; not less. Previous research shows that women were 12.2% of the pastors in 1925, and 26.7% of the evangelists in 1940. The good news is that 1985 seems to have marked the bottom for the decline in the percent of female pastors, and we are slowly increasing the gender diversity of our clergy, but much work remains to be done.

Conclusions

All of us experience some temptation to cultural snobbery – ethnocentrism. The people we identify with (sociologists) may seem most worthy, most deserving of the ministry of the church, or most significant. It may be more difficult for us to affirm Nazarenes in other age, education, or income groups. Therefore, one of our major challenges as we cultivate community will be to recognize and take joy in the diversity that exists. We will need to continually examine our temptation to ethnocentrism in order to make certain that we strategize, prepare ministers, and allocate resources to effectively minister in the existing diversity.

A second major challenge as we cultivate community will be to extend the diversity in the denomination. We need to establish more churches in the cultural groups where we are poorly represented. We need more thriving, healthy churches and fewer losses among white, English speaking churches. We need more diversity in the ministerial corps. As the example of women in ministry demonstrates, we need to do much better in preparing and deploying ministers who are other than white, English-speaking, and males.

Although we want to cultivate diversity in many forms, we ultimately come together to celebrate that which we have in common—salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ; a life of Christ-like holiness; and a shared mission to reach the lost and disciple believers. This means that there is still a need to be exclusive in some ways or we will lose our essential identity. The church is a body of believers—not non-believers. Accepting those with a sinful lifestyle into church membership would compromise the Christian faith and the integrity of the church. While we seek to grow the church and cultivate community among diverse people, we must continue to require professions of faith evidenced by changed lifestyles, as well as commitment to our shared beliefs and mission, as conditions for membership.

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