

Do New Nazarene Churches “Do Better” When Started Near Existing Nazarene Churches?

A Report to the Church of the Nazarene

by

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Conclusions in a nutshell: This report examines new Nazarene congregations started between 1975 and 1990 to see what factors influence the size of the church (measured as average a.m. Sunday attendance) in the fifth year of the congregation’s operations. The focal question is whether there is an advantage when such congregations are located nearby already existing congregations. The answer is yes. In fact, location in a county with more Nazarene churches and more Nazarene members is one of the single strongest predictors of greater average attendance in the fifth year. Locating in an urban county that is increasing in population is, unsurprisingly, also related to greater fifth year attendance. New congregations with no changes in pastoral leadership during the first five years also do better. Higher levels of pastoral calling (visiting attenders) and church use of advertising also slightly increases fifth year attendance.

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I. Background/Reason for Study

In the spring of 1998 I (Dan Olson) was engaged in a number of studies examining how the religious composition of counties, especially their religious pluralism, affects the behavior of the churches and churchgoers in these same counties. Because I knew of the high quality of the data collected by the Church of the Nazarene I asked Rich Houseal, then director of research, if it would be possible to have access to several consecutive years of official church data from the Church of the Nazarene. It was agreed that I would share my results with the Church and I then received data for the eleven years beginning with 1980 and continuing through 1990. In order to protect the anonymity of the churches, the names and addresses of the churches were first removed from the file, but the county location of each church remained so that I could match the churches with information on demographic characteristics of the county (from U.S. census data) and the religious composition of each county, (data available from the ASARB-Glenmary data set). At the time I obtained the data I mentioned that it might be some time before I would actually be able to complete this research.

In the summer of 2001 I received a grant of \$1,500 from the Constance Jacquet Award of the Religious Research Association to help fund my time to complete this research. As part of the research plan for the grant I agreed to write both an academic paper on the results and complete a report for the Church of the Nazarene on topics of interest to church leaders. The initial draft of the academic report was completed in the summer of 2001 and was presented at the annual meetings of the Association for the Sociology of Religion in Anaheim, California in August of 2001 and shared with Rich Houseal and current director of research, Kenneth Crow. This report (the one you are now reading) is the second part of the products promised in the Jacquet Award grant proposal.

II. Primary Research Question

Although there are many questions that can be answered from the Nazarene data, when I asked Rich Houseal which issues he most wanted to know more about he replied that he had always wondered, but had never had the time to systematically examine, whether new churches “do better” when they are founded near lots of other Nazarene churches or in areas where there are few existing Nazarene congregations. Ken Crow, current director of Nazarene research agreed that this question would be worth exploring.

Rich Houseal deliberately left the **meaning of a church “doing better”** fairly ambiguous. While this can mean several things, using only official church statistics I can only look at a small number of factors. Because I do not have data that assesses, for example, the spiritual vitality of a congregation, I decided to focus on growth in number of a.m. worship attenders up through the fifth year after a new congregation is founded. Thus the **main dependent variable is the average a.m. worship attendance during the fifth year** since the congregation was founded. Prior to the founding of the congregation, all congregations have zero attenders. Thus average attendance in the fifth year represents net growth from the beginning of the congregation. It is true that some congregations start out with a core group from an existing congregation and thus some might argue that the size of this core group should be subtracted from the total “growth” of the congregation over the five years. However, since access to such a “core group” from a nearby congregation might be one of the things that varies among churches started nearby or far away from existing Nazarene churches, it is an element that should be included when measuring the advantages or disadvantages of a new congregation’s location.

III. Data Used in this Analysis

The data on Church of the Nazarene congregations is drawn from the official church statistics on Nazarene congregations **in the U.S. for the years 1980 through 1990**. The data for each congregation was matched with 1980 U.S. census data and data on the religious composition of the county in which each church was located. Data on the religious composition of counties comes from the 1980 ASARB-Glenmary data. These data were gathered from participating Christian denominations (that accounted for about 90 percent of U.S. church members in 1980) who reported, for each county, the number of churches and number of members belonging to their denomination.

Because the focus of this report is on **new churches**, most of the analyses reported here are based on churches that were **organized between 1976 and 1990**. In order to make the data from churches founded in different years more comparable, I rearranged the data in such a way that the membership, attendance, financial giving figures, etc. are linked to the number of years since founding rather than to a specific calendar year. Thus rather than comparing the attendance figures of new churches in a single year, say 1981, I can compare attendance figures of new churches during their year of founding (regardless of what year that was), during their second year since founding, etc. This means that for churches founded in 1976, I have figures for their fifth year (1980) through their fifteenth year (1990) while for churches founded in, say, 1982, I have figures for their first year through their ninth year (1990).

In order to maximize the number of congregations that can be compared I focus primarily on data from the first five years after founding. For example, a church founded in 1988 would only have data for years one through three (since 1990 is the last year of data that I have).

In one sense it is unfortunate that some of these data are now more than 20 years old. However, the use of these older data protects the privacy and interests of current churchgoers (even with the names and addresses of the congregations removed). Nevertheless, many of the factors examined in this report are unlikely to have changed since then (except in ways that will be obvious to Nazarene church officials).

IV. Preliminary Questions

How Many New Churches?

How many new churches were founded between 1976 and 1990? The table below shows the number of churches founded each year as indicated by the church's year of organization (the *asmbyr* variable in the data set)

Number of U.S. Nazarene churches founded by year of founding

Year	Churches	Percent
1976	29	3.8
1977	30	3.9
1978	24	3.1
1979	43	5.6
1980	47	6.1
1981	53	6.9
1982	43	5.6
1983	50	6.5
1984	73	9.5
1985	46	6.0
1986	49	6.4
1987	73	9.5
1988	74	9.6
1989	72	9.4
1990	63	8.2
Total	769	100.0

The number of churches founded per year was generally higher in the 1980s, especially the late 1980s than in the late 1970s.

How Many New Churches Closed?

In separate analyses I found that 27 of these 769 new churches (or about 3.5 percent) had “closed” (had a reported average a.m. worship attendance of zero) by 1990.

Because the number of closed churches is so small, I did not perform many analyses to specifically determine what factors might lead to closing, versus keeping a church going. However, in the analyses of attendance patterns below I treat a closed church as a church with zero attendance (rather than as missing data) so that the data from such a church would contribute to understanding why some churches do not grow as well.

Are New Churches More Likely to Close? No.

Although there are not enough new closed churches to do a careful analysis of *why* the churches closed, I wondered whether the rate of closure among new churches is higher than the rate of closure of older churches. For comparison purposes I examined all 4,339 U.S. Nazarene churches founded before 1976 that were still open in 1980 and found that 156 (or about 3.6 percent) had closed by 1990. This is similar to the 3.5 percent closure rate experienced by the “new” churches.

Whatever the reason, it would appear from this simple comparison that new churches are not especially fragile or prone to closure.

New Churches Tend to be Founded in Less Nazarene Areas?

Prior to asking whether new churches do better when founded near other Nazarene churches, it is worth asking whether there is a tendency to found new churches near other Nazarene churches or in areas where there are not many Nazarene churches.

Since the data I received contain no street addresses I was not able to measure distances between nearby congregations. However, I do have information from the 1980 Glenmary-ASARB data set on how many Nazarene congregations were located in the same county in 1980. I also have information from this same data source on the number of Nazarene church adherents (members and estimated number of children of official members) in the county.

It appears that over the time period studied (1976 to 1990) there was a *slight tendency to locate new Nazarene congregations in “less Nazarene” counties*. By “less Nazarene” I mean counties where Nazarenes make up a smaller proportion of all the church adherents in the county and/or where the actual number of Nazarene adherents is less. Among all U.S. Nazarene congregations continuously in existence from 1980 to 1990, the average Nazarene congregation was located in a county where 2.61 percent of all church adherents counted in the 1980 Glenmary-ASARB data belonged to Nazarene congregations. However, the average percent Nazarene in the counties

where the “new” Nazarene congregations were founded was only 1.57 percent.

This may reflect a tendency to expand Nazarene presence into areas where there are currently fewer Nazarene churches and/or it may reflect a resistance by existing Nazarene congregations to locating new congregations where they can become a potential competitor for Nazarene attenders.

Are New Churches Founded in Less Religious Areas? No

I also wondered if there might be a tendency to start new congregations in areas where there are relatively fewer churches and churchgoers (of all denominations). Such a policy might be motivated by evangelistic goals or by a logic that the potential pool of unchurched persons not already committed to a congregation is larger.

I first compared churches founded before 1976 with those founded after 1976 to see if the new churches were more likely to be in areas with lower rates of overall church participation. I found no difference between the old and new churches in this regard. I next examined all Nazarene congregations, both old and new, and found that the average rate of churchgoing in the counties where Nazarene churches are located is about the same as the average rate of churchgoing across all U.S. counties. Nazarene churches as a whole are not systematically located in less religious or more religious counties.

New Church Founding by Region

I also examined whether certain regions of the country were more likely to found new Nazarene congregations during the 1976 to 1990 period. Again I counted any congregation founded after 1975 as a “new” congregation and all the remaining Nazarene congregations as “old” congregations. The table below shows the percentage of Nazarene congregations in each U.S. census region that are new congregations. Note that some of the churches (both new and old) in the table below were closed (had an attendance of zero) but remained in the 1990 data. Nevertheless, their regional location and date of founding (old versus new) provides relevant information.

Percent of all Nazarene congregations that were founded after 1975 by U.S. census region

REGION	Percent New Churches	Difference from mean percent of 15.310	N of Churches
New England	14.894	-0.416	141
Middle Atlantic	19.207	3.897	328
East North Central	8.991	-6.319	1279
West North Central	10.474	-4.836	506
South Atlantic	23.724	8.414	725
East South Central	13.552	-1.758	487
West South Central	15.312	0.002	738
Mountain	17.192	1.882	349
Pacific	19.973	4.663	731
Total	15.310		5284

The column labeled “Percent New Churches” shows the percent of all Nazarene congregations in the 1990 data set in each U.S. census region that were *founded after 1975*. At the bottom of this column one can see that among all Nazarene congregations 15.31 percent were founded after 1975. The column labeled “Difference from mean percent of 15.310” shows the percentage by which the percent of new churches in a region exceeds or is below the average percentage for all regions. The final column, N of churches, shows how many congregations, both new and old both open and closed (by 1990) were counted for each census region. Looking at this final column, one can see for example that the least Nazarene census region is New England while the largest concentration of Nazarene congregations is found in the East North Central states (Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio).

Looking at the column labeled “Difference from mean percent of 15.310” one sees that regions that have the lowest percentage of new are the East North Central and the West North Central regions while the South Atlantic region has the highest percentage of new congregations followed distantly by the Pacific region.

V. Average Attendance of New Churches

How Does Attendance Change In the First Few Years?

Average A.M. Worship Attendance Among New Nazarene Congregations.

Age of Cong.	Mean Attendance	Std. Deviation	Max. Avr. Attendance	Number of Congs.
1 st Year	32.74650	24.58895	235.000	643
2 nd Year	39.51204	28.21608	332.000	623
3 rd Year	43.01913	31.88483	200.000	575
4 th Year	46.82264	39.65816	261.000	530
5 th Year	49.22634	43.28332	325.000	486
6 th Year	50.90389	46.99497	348.000	437
7 th Year	53.29156	50.13052	378.000	391
8 th Year	56.15723	55.97448	435.000	318
9 th Year	60.77985	69.05255	584.000	268
10 th Year	60.58222	65.45632	430.000	225
11 th Year	66.58721	74.29882	454.000	172
12 th Year	67.52800	70.67093	447.000	125
13 th Year	72.43902	77.84808	466.000	82
14 th Year	62.54237	63.31784	317.000	59
15 th Year	54.17241	40.97741	172.000	29

The table above shows the average a.m. worship attendance reported during the first year (the calendar year in which they were founded even if they were founded late in that year) through the 15th year since founding. The number of congregations for which data is available declines for the later years since, for example, data for the 15th year of operation is only available for the churches founded in 1976. (The most recent Nazarene data available to me comes from 1990). In contrast data for the first year of operation is available for all churches founded in 1980 through 1990.

Note that the average a.m. attendance climbs from about 33 people during the first year to about 72 people during the 13th year. The apparent slight drop in the mean attendance after the 13th year is probably not a real phenomenon but is due instead to random variation in attendance and the small number of churches available for analysis beyond the 13th year.

Note that the average attendance figures include “new” churches that closed and thus have average attendance figures of zero. So the figures may be somewhat lower than they would be if closed churches were excluded. But if one excludes the closed churches one throws away data from churches that did less well and thus one loses part of the overall picture of congregational growth.

Are new congregations smaller? By way of comparison, among all 4,878 U.S. Nazarene

congregations appearing in the 1980 data set (both open and closed congregations), the average reported a.m. worship attendance was 91.63. So while new Nazarene congregations are still smaller, on average, than older Nazarene congregations, even after ten years, they are well on their way to attaining the same average size as other Nazarene congregations. Of course, as the column labeled “Max. Avr. Attendance” suggests, some new churches have a much larger average attendance even during the first year in which they are organized.

**Does Proximity to Nazarene Churches Lead to Greater Fifth Year Average Attendance?
Yes**

Proximity to other Nazarene congregations and Nazarene churchgoers benefits new church growth. My initial analysis of attendance trends using correlations shows that attendance in the first five years is positively associated with the number of Nazarene adherents and congregations in a county in 1980, but is not related to the percent of the county that is Nazarene. In other words, it is the actual number of Nazarene churches and, even more so, the number of Nazarene churchgoers that affects new congregational growth, not the percent of the county that is Nazarene..

The table below makes this more concrete. Half of the new Nazarene congregations were located in counties with 3 or fewer Nazarene congregations in 1980. Thus the table shows average a.m. attendance separately for those new congregations in counties with three or fewer and those congregations in counties with four or more Nazarene congregations in 1980.

Age of Cong.	3 or Fewer Naz. Congs. in County		4 or More Naz. Congs. in County	
	Mean Attendance	N. of Congs.	Mean Attendance	N. of Congs
1 st Year	29.82979	329	35.88179	313
2 nd Year	36.36478	318	42.89474	304
3 rd Year	38.31419	296	48.12590	278
4 th Year	40.75532	282	53.87854	247
5 th Year	40.69767	258	58.87719	228

For all years, beginning with the first year a congregation is organized, the average attendance is higher if the church is located in a county with four or more other Nazarene congregations in the county. Separate regression analyses not shown here indicates that this result is *only partly explained by the greater population density* of counties with more Nazarene congregations. (An urban county is likely to have more Nazarene congregations, and higher average attendance, than

a rural county.)

Partial Explanation—Transfers From Other Nazarene Congregations

One explanation for the better growth of new congregations located in more Nazarene areas is that the new Nazarene congregations *may get some of their additional attendance boost simply by drawing off some of the attenders of other Nazarene congregations*. Some of this may be deliberate when a group of attenders at one congregation decides to go and be the core group at the new congregation. Thus some new Nazarene congregations have an average attendance greater than 100 during their founding year. Also, when a new Nazarene congregation is founded, some disgruntled attenders of existing Nazarene congregations might leave their current congregation to join the new congregation. Since people who are already attending a Nazarene congregation are probably more likely than non-Nazarenes and unchurched persons to start attending a new Nazarene congregation, the more Nazarene congregations in the area, the greater is the pool of potentially disgruntled Nazarene attenders from which the new congregation can draw. Not all of these switchers need be “disgruntled.” Some Nazarene churchgoers may switch to the new church simply because it is closer to their home..

It would be interesting to examine whether older Nazarene congregations in the vicinity of a newly founded Nazarene congregation grow less well than other Nazarene congregations. While such an analysis is technically possible with the data I have, it requires considerable time in data preparation (calculating for each “older” congregation how many “new” congregations were formed recently in the same county). Unfortunately, my current time constraints don’t allow me to do this additional analysis.

But Also More Growth From Non-Nazarene Sources in More Nazarene Counties

Since the Nazarene church data indicate, for each year, how many of the new members joining in a particular year are received by letter of transfer from other Nazarene congregations, it is possible to examine how many of the new members come from other Nazarene congregations.

Analysis of these data (not shown in detail here) shows that the higher growth rates of new Nazarene congregations in more Nazarene counties has more to do with greater growth from *non-Nazarene sources* than from Nazarene sources. The “partial explanation” described above is still true. New Nazarene congregations located in more Nazarene counties receive a larger *number* of new members as transfers from other Nazarene congregations than do new congregations located in less Nazarene counties. However, congregations in more Nazarene counties *also* receive a greater *number* of new members from non-Nazarene sources. Being in a more Nazarene county not only means greater growth from Nazarene transfers but also greater growth from non-Nazarene sources. In fact, the *proportion* of new members that come from previous Nazarene congregations is actually lower in more Nazarene counties (at least among newly founded congregations), meaning, as is stated at the beginning of this paragraph, that the

greater growth of new congregations in more Nazarene counties is more due to non-Nazarene than Nazarene sources of growth.

A “Fertile Soil” Explanation

Its not hard to understand how new congregations would be able to grow by drawing on the existing members of nearby Nazarene congregations, but why would non-Nazarenes be more likely to join a new Nazarene congregation when that congregation is located in a more Nazarene county? Probably for some of the same reasons that the county already has more Nazarene churches and churchgoers. That is, the factors (whatever they are) that caused the county to have more Nazarene churches and churchgoers probably also account for the greater ability of new Nazarene churches in these same counties to attract non-Nazarenes.

Just as an acorn is more likely to grow well in soil that already supports lots of oak trees than in soil where no oak trees are growing, so a new Nazarene congregation will probably grow better in counties where other Nazarene congregations have already done well. Unlike oak trees, where there may be some negative effect of the shade from mature oak trees on the new oak seedling, new Nazarene churches also benefit (as is discussed above) from membership transfers from nearby mature Nazarene congregations. Thus new congregations in more Nazarene counties benefit both from better “soil” and from other nearby Nazarene congregations and members.

What factors make for better “soil” for new Nazarene church “plants”?

What is it about more Nazarene counties that make them more “fertile soil” for new Nazarene congregations? Unfortunately the data I have only allows for partial answers to this question and some of these answers are quite obvious. My analysis suggests that the data to which I have access do not contain measures of the most important of these factors. In other words, aside from the obvious things, I do not yet know the main factors that make some counties more favorable for Nazarene growth generally.

From a policy perspective it would be nice to identify these specific characteristics of “fertile soil” since this would enable one to identify locations where these factors are present even in counties that currently do not have many Nazarene churches. This is analogous to finding locations where no oak trees are currently growing but for which the soil is well suited for the growth of oak seedlings. Without knowing the most important characteristics that make some soils more fertile, identifying such areas is difficult. To be “safe” one could use the presence of other thriving Nazarene congregations as an indicator of good “soil” and start other new Nazarene congregations in these areas. But of course, this is a theological/strategic as well as a practical/tactical policy decision with a number of tradeoffs that I briefly discuss in my “reflections” at the end of this report.

Recognizing that I have not yet identified the most important characteristics of what makes more Nazarene areas better “soil,” it is nevertheless possible to identify some of these factors. Multiple regression analyses (not shown in this report) make it possible to look at the simultaneous effects of many different variables on new church growth. If one first looks only at characteristics of the surrounding county using data drawn from the U.S. census data for counties, one finds that new Nazarene churches grow fastest (have the highest average attendance in their fifth year) when located in counties where:

- 1) general population growth rates are higher, and where
- 2) the county is more urban.

While both of these factors provide more fertile soil for church growth, neither result is particularly surprising. Rapid population growth means that there are more people in an area possibly looking for a congregation to join. The greater growth of urban new churches need not imply that urbanites have a mentality that predisposes them, more than rural dwellers, to join Nazarene congregations. More likely it simply means that in densely populated areas there are more people living within a short distance of the church who are available to join a new Nazarene congregation. Urban congregations, both old and new, are generally larger than rural congregations.

Not only do these two variables explain why some new congregations grow faster, they are two of the factors that make for “fertile soil” for both new and old Nazarene congregations. They partly explain why new Nazarene congregations do better when founded near other Nazarene congregations. (The remainder of this paragraph is for readers familiar with multiple regression.) When population growth rates and percent of the county that is urban are added as independent variables to regressions already using Nazarene presence (measured as number of Nazarene adherents in the county) to predict the average fifth year attendance of new congregations, the standardized beta for Nazarene presence becomes slightly smaller but remains substantial (.220, $p < .001$). This indicates that counties with more Nazarene adherents are more “fertile soil” partly because they tend to be more urban counties and have higher population growth rates. However, it also indicates that most of the characteristics of the more “fertile soil” of more Nazarene counties have still to be identified.

County Census Variables That Do Not Appear to Aid New Nazarene Church Growth

It also should be noted that there are some county census characteristics that *do not* have a significant effect on *new* Nazarene church growth including median age, median income, median education completed of people over age 25, proportion white, and the percent of the county that already belongs to some church. (Note that the factors affecting the growth rate of older Nazarene congregations and the size of the already existing Nazarene presence in a county may be somewhat different and require separate analyses to identify). Readers should also note that there may be other variables not available to me that have a significant effect on new Nazarene church growth.

The Relative Importance of Nearby Nazarene Congregations

The focus of this report is on the effect of nearby Nazarene congregations, but how important is this single factor when compared to census variables such as urbanism and population growth rates?

In multiple regression when the single variable, the number of Nazarene adherents (church members and their children) in the county in 1980, is added as an additional independent variable alongside the census variables discussed above, the r-squared for predicting average attendance in the fifth year jumps from .095 to .128 and the standardized beta for the number of Nazarene adherents in the county is larger than for any of the census variables.

For non-statisticians this means that the number of Nazarenes already in the county has a bigger effect on new church growth than any other single characteristic of the surrounding county measured by the census variables. The size of this effect is also apparent in the table above comparing new church growth in counties with three or fewer Nazarene churches with counties having more than three Nazarene congregations.

VI Characteristics of the New Congregation that aid New Church Growth

Pastor's Tenure

The number of years the pastor has been at the congregation turns out to be an important variable affecting average attendance in the fifth year. Although this variable can only be calculated for about 200 of the new churches (since the information wasn't collected until 1986), it is clearly a very important factor in new church growth. During the fifth year since founding, congregations having pastors who had been at the church for four years or less had an average a.m. attendance of 47 members while pastors with five or more years at the church had an average of 56 members. In multiple regression, controlling for all other variables described above, the length of the pastor's tenure at the congregation had more of an effect on fifth year attendance than any other variable (including number of Nazarene adherents in the county). My guess, though I haven't confirmed it with further analysis, is that pastoral changes result in an attendance decline during the transition period and it takes some time to recover from this decline.

Additionally, and this is only a hunch based on my personal experience and analysis of data from other denominations, many of the people who join a just founded congregation attend, in part, because they are attracted to the pastor (not because this is the church their mother attended or the church their close friends already attend). When the pastor leaves, this major source of attraction for most of the existing attenders is removed. People whose attendance is based on their preference for this pastor may leave at this time unless they have found other reasons to

stay, e.g., new friendships with other attenders.

While I have confidence in the above explanation, it is worth noting that some pastors may have left because the church was not growing quickly enough and they, or the congregation, perceived them as the main impediment to growth. In that case, the small attendance would be the cause and the pastor's leaving would be the effect (rather than the other way around as is assumed in the previous two paragraphs).

Outreach and Inreach Efforts

Throughout the 1980s the official Nazarene church data included information on the number of revivals held at a church during the past year, the number of pastoral calls made and the number of church participants trained in personal evangelism. The *number of revivals* turns out *not* to be related to the growth of new congregations. However, the number of *pastoral calls* made is positively and *quite strongly related to new church growth*. Although the number of people trained in evangelism initially appears to be related to growth, this is only because large churches have more people they can train in evangelism. (The number trained in evangelism may thus merely be another indirect measure of church size). If one instead examines the *proportion of attenders* trained in evangelism, there is no effect upon the average attendance during the fifth year since founding.

During the latter part of the 1980s Nazarene church data included information on whether or not churches engaged in each of several advertising efforts (including radio shows, radio spots, tv specials, tv spots, and newspaper advertising). For each church I summed the number of yes answer to these five questions together to get a total number of advertising methods used by a church. Advertising of this type appears to have a weak, but statistically significant positive effect on fifth year average attendance. Unfortunately, the data is currently arranged in a way that is not convenient for me to examine which of these advertising methods has the most positive effect on fifth year average attendance.

VII. Some Reflections

Writing as an outsider to the Church of the Nazarene, the policy implications of these results are not entirely clear. However a couple of observations and questions are relevant here.

First, the evidence suggests that during the 1975-1990 time period new Nazarene congregations were somewhat more likely to be started in counties that were less Nazarene, that is they had fewer existing Nazarene congregations and members and the proportion of all churchgoers that were Nazarenes in 1980 was smaller. However, the evidence also suggests that new churches grow faster when they are located in more Nazarene counties. The policy issue to consider is whether it is more important to start new congregations where there is currently little opportunity for people to join a Nazarene congregation (and where the new church may struggle more with

growth) or whether it is better to start new Nazarene congregations in areas where the “soil” has already proven to be “productive.” This is of course a theological issue as well as an organizational strategy issue that I am not in a position to answer.

Second, it may be important to think about pastoral tenure issues for new churches. In some denominations there are pastors who specialize in church planting, they start one congregation, get it going, and then move on to start a new congregation. The results discussed above suggest that this may be detrimental to the growth of newly planted churches. However, it is not clear whether such a policy is detrimental to the total number of Nazarene attenders in an area. For example, is it better for someone to start just one new congregation and get it to an average attendance of 50 members after five years, or might it be better for an effective church planter to start two congregations during that same five year period whose total attendance combined might be 70 people?

Third, the reader should not assume that just because a certain variable isn't mentioned in the above discussion of variables affecting church growth that the variable is unrelated to new church growth. Two factors limited the kinds of variables that I discussed above. First, and most importantly, I could only examine variables to which I had access. Thus I did not discuss the role of prayer or the theological orientation of the congregation. Second, I chose not to discuss some variables that appeared to have only weak effects in the statistical tests that I performed. For example, location in the Pacific Coast census region appears to be a slight disadvantage to newly founded congregations, but this effect borders on statistical insignificance and isn't worth mentioning lest some policy decision be based on what turns out not to be an unimportant factor or a statistical fluke.

Finally, it is important to note that the results reported here for new church starts may not apply to older congregations. In fact, the key finding of this report runs somewhat contrary to my results (reported in a conference paper last year) when all Nazarene congregations (old and new) are examined. Among all Nazarene congregations (mostly older congregations), congregations located in *less Nazarene counties* actually *grow slightly but not substantially better* than other Nazarene congregations. A full examination and discussion of why being located in more Nazarene counties might switch from a growth advantage to a slight growth disadvantage as a congregation matures goes beyond the scope of this report and requires more analysis than I have done up to this point. Nevertheless, readers should be aware that being in a more Nazarene county might not remain an advantage to a church as it matures, and (more importantly I think) as the average membership tenure of its members increases.