

A DECADAL STUDY OF NEW NAZARENES: THE FIRST YEAR

The Great Commission commands the church to make disciples (Matthew 28: 19, NIV). Obedient Christians have found it natural to be living testimonials to the grace of God. Effective evangelism is inherent in the nature of a healthy church.

As members, congregations, districts, and denominational leaders have prayerfully reviewed our service, we have considered the fruits of evangelism to examine our Great Commission commitments and the effectiveness of our evangelistic methods. Knowing what God is blessing helps direct the investment of our resources - personally, congregationally, and denominationally. The question John Wesley asked is often part of our stewardship evaluations. "Ought we not diligently to observe in what places God is pleased to pour out His Spirit more abundantly?" He answered, "We ought: and at that time to send more laborers than usual into that part of the harvest" (in "The Large Minutes" The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. 1972. Vol. VIII. London: Wesleyan Conference Office. Pages 300-301).

Obedience to the Great Commission includes "Baptizing" and "Teaching" converts (Matthew 28: 19, NIV). Incorporation into the fellowship of the church and Christian nurture are part of disciple making. In the New Testament model the fruit of evangelism must survive and mature. So, Nazarene examinations of great commission commitment have included reports of "New Nazarenes." "New Nazarenes" include Christians who come into Nazarene membership from other denominations, but most are members joining by profession of their faith.

However, we have been better able to observe methods God was pleased to use in bringing people to conversions than we were able to discern what He was blessing in nurture and real incorporation into the body of the church. Jesus said, "I chose you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last" (John 15: 16). We know about fruit bearing - how many Christians are joining the church. And, we know that the number dropping out - fruit which did not last - is relatively high. We do not know enough about the factors which facilitate endurance or those which tend to cause falling away.

While assumptions have been made about the persistence of New Nazarenes, data have not been available to test these theories. Therefore, when the Nazarene ANSR POLL panels were created for the 1989-1993 quadrennium, a panel of "New Nazarenes" was also established. This sample consists of each new member who joined any of a random, stratified sample of Nazarene congregations in the United States during the 1989 assembly year. Congregations were selected using proportionate distributions of congregations in eight geographical regions and four size categories. This procedure resulted in 162 churches and, after list corrections by several of the pastors, the total New Nazarenes was 1,722.

In January of 1991 the first of an intended annual survey of the pastors of this sample was conducted. The names of the congregation's "New Nazarenes" were printed on the questionnaires. Pastors were asked to respond to questions about the involvement of each person and, if appropriate, to indicate causes of inactivity or withdrawal.

The protection of new members was an important concern in the study. Therefore, pastors were surveyed rather than the new members themselves. However, this approach inevitably added to the heavy demands on these pastors. Larger churches were asked to evaluate long lists of New Nazarenes. And, without this request, there were undoubtedly already more responsibilities than the available staff could accomplish. In smaller churches where the list of New Nazarenes was shorter, secretarial or ministerial staff assistance was unlikely. So, the ANSR POLL staff, other congregations, pastors, and denominational leaders are grateful for the sacrificial involvement of these pastors and their staffs. We will benefit from their cooperation.

With one follow-up mailing 136 (83%) responses were received. This is a very strong rate of response. However, larger churches were less likely to respond than smaller ones. The mean size of non-responding churches was 319 (St.Dev. 232) compared to an overall mean in the sample of 245 (St.Dev. 226). Therefore, the proportion of New Nazarenes for whom data were received was lower (76%; 1,314) than the level of churches which responded.

As table 1 indicates, most (87.9%) New Nazarenes experienced stability in their pastoral relationship through their first year. One in fifteen (6.6%) were no longer members at the end of one year, although 32 of these had transferred to another Nazarene church. One in five (19.7%) were not judged by their pastors to be active members after one year. The 232 inactive members include, of course, the 86 former members.

TABLE 1

**New Nazarenes' Relationship
To The Pastor And The Congregation**

Item	Total N	Yes		No	
		N	%	N	%
Did this person become a church member under your ministry?	1314 *	1157	87.9%	160	12.1%
Is this person still a member of your church?	1307	1220	93.3%	86	6.6%
Is this person an active member of your church?	1178 **	946	80.3%	232	19.7%

*408 of the 1722 New Nazarenes were from Non-Responding Churches

**Responding Churches did not indicate "activity" for 136 members

The membership and inactivity questions were used to screen responses to the remainder of the questionnaire. The first group of items dealt with involvement in the church and was applied only to continuing, active members. The second group dealt with the nature of leaving the membership and with sources of inactivity or withdrawal. Therefore, responses to involvement questions deal with 82% of the New Nazarenes and the inactivity questions provide information regarding 18%. However, whenever pastors provided information, for example on earlier involvement of members who have since become inactive, it has been included in the analysis.

LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

More than one-third (35.2%) of the New Nazarenes were said by their pastor to be more involved in the church than they were a year before. Table 5 also indicates that half (50.3%) were as active as before.

TABLE 2

How Active Is This Person Compared To A Year Ago?

Level Involved	Number	Percent
More Involved	361	35.2%
About the Same	515	50.3%
Less Involved	148	14.5%
Totals	1,024	100.0%

AREAS OF INVOLVEMENT

Almost two-thirds of the New Nazarenes are involved in Worship Services (62.1%) and Sunday School (65.2%). On the other hand, one in four (27.6%) are not involved in "service in the church" and most (56.4%) are not involved in "outreach service".

The value of these items may be greater as time goes by. In this first year, the initial patterns of new members may be observed. However, annual surveys should make it possible to determine whether, and how, involvement in various ministry activities influences integration into, or withdrawal from, the fellowship of the church.

TABLE 3

HOW INVOLVED IS THIS MEMBER IN THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES OF THE CHURCH?

Activity	Total N	Very Involved		Involved		Not Involved	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Worship Service	1084	673	62.1%	250	23.1%	161	14.9%
Sunday School	1056	688	65.2%	217	20.5%	151	14.3%
Choir or other Music	1048	148	14.1%	131	12.5%	769	73.4%
Other Bible Study	1029	203	19.7%	326	31.7%	500	48.6%
Service in the Church	1022	354	34.6%	386	37.8%	282	27.6%
Outreach Service	1026	158	15.4%	289	28.2%	579	56.4%

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

After one year as Nazarenes, half (53.0%) of the active members are perceived by their pastors to be growing in grace. Another 36.3% are said to have a stable faith.

TABLE 4

Is This Member Maturing In Their Faith?

Faith Development	Number	Percent
Growing in Grace	543	53.0%
Stable Faith	372	36.3%
Becoming Weaker	109	10.7%
Totals	1,024	100.0%

AGE

Three-fourths (75.7%) of the persisting New Nazarenes are over 25 years old. Most members who join the Church of the Nazarene are apparently older than the teen years or early twenties which might have been expected.

Two out of five (41.4%) are in the "baby boomer" age group: from 26 through 40. This is true in spite of the fact that this category only includes 15 years. The next largest category, 41 through 65, has 27.1% of the New Nazarenes. However, this category is larger, covering 25 years.

Unfortunately, the questions seeking personal information were placed on the questionnaire after the screening questions. Therefore, in this first year it is impossible to determine whether members who have already become inactive were different from the larger group in terms of age, involvement before joining, or relationships within the church. However, the information obtained this year will be available for analysis of future annual surveys.

TABLE 5

What Is The Age Group Of This Person?

Category	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Under 16	79	7.5%	7.5%
16 - 25	177	16.8%	24.3%
26 - 40	436	41.4%	65.7%
41 - 65	285	27.1%	92.8%
Over 65	76	7.2%	100.0%
Total	1,053	100.0%	

RELATIONSHIPS

About two out of five (42.5%) of the New Nazarenes who survived the first year have immediate family members in the church. Half (41.3%) have close friends within the group. No data are available for assessing the role of these relationships in the decision to join the church. However, previous research suggests that their existence should improve the likelihood of the retention of these members.

TABLE 6

How Many Relationships Does This Member Have In The Congregation?

Relationship	Number	Percent
Immediate Family Members	559	42.5%
Other Relatives	215	16.4%
Close Friends	722	55.0%

PRIOR INVOLVEMENT

The majority (61.7%) of the persisting New Nazarenes have been participating in their congregations for at least three years. Almost half (47.1%) have been involved for from three to five years.

TABLE 7

How Long Has This Member Been Participating In This Congregation?

Time in Church	Number	Percent
0-2 Years	398	38.3%
3-5 Years	489	47.1%
Over 5 Years	152	14.6%

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP LOSS

Pastors indicated, in table 1, that 6.6% (86) of the New Nazarenes were no longer members. They were then asked to indicate how each left. Data were provided for 62 of the 86. Of these, half (51.6%) left by transfer to another Nazarene congregation. Another one-fourth (22.6%) transferred to another denomination. About one in ten (9.7%) were officially removed from membership. And, one in six (16.1%) were lost through death. These 62 losses were about one in twenty (4.8%) of the total sample.

TABLE 8

How Was This Person Taken Off Your Membership List?

	Number	Percent of Total*	Percent of Losses
Transferred to another Nazarene church	32	2.4%	51.6%
Transferred to another denomination	14	1.1%	22.6%
Removal	6	.5%	9.7%
Death	10	.8%	16.1%
Totals	62	4.8%	100.0%

*Percent of the 1,314 for whom responses were obtained

FACTORS INFLUENCING INACTIVITY OR WITHDRAWAL

The factors most likely to have caused losses of New Nazarenes during their first year were moving (6.9%), changing churches (4.3%), apathy (2.7%), backsliding (2.4%), and changing jobs (2.1%).

TABLE 9

**What Factor(S) Led This New Nazarene
To Become Inactive Or A Non-Member?**

	Number	Percent*
Moved	92	7.0%
Started attending another church	58	4.4%
Apathy, not interested now	39	3.0%
Backslidden	32	2.4%
Job Change	28	2.1%
Conflict in church	16	1.2%
Friendship breakup	13	1.0%
Doctrinal disagreement	12	.9%
Marital breakup	12	.9%
Incapacitated	12	.9%
I really don't know	11	.8%
Serving in Armed Forces	5	.4%
Disagreed with Special Rules	4	.3%
Not accepted by other members	4	.3%
Problem with worship	3	.2%
Helping plant a church	2	.2%
Never made enough church friends	2	.2%
End of Divorce/Suicide crisis period	2	.2%
Embarrassed by Illegitimate pregnancy	1	.1%
New spouse was Baptist	1	.1%
Conflict with relative in the church	1	.1%
Church expected too little	1	.1%
Church expected too much	0	.0%

*Percent of the 1314 for whom responses were obtained

SUMMARY

Most (87.9%) New Nazarenes did not experience a change of pastors during their first year.

Some attrition takes place very quickly in the membership career. By the end of the first year one in fifteen (6.6%) were no longer members of the church they joined. Of these about half were still Nazarenes, having transferred to another Nazarene church. Another one-fourth were still in the Christian community, having transferred to another denomination.

Most (80.3%) were active members after one year. The factors most likely to have caused inactivity or withdrawal of New Nazarenes during their first year were moving (7%), changing churches (4.4%), apathy (3.0%), backsliding (2.4%), and changing jobs (2.1%).

Many (35.2%) of the New Nazarenes who persisted had increased involvement during the year. Another half (50.3%) were as active as before.

Three-fourths (75.7%) of the persistent New Nazarenes are over 25 years old. Two out of five (41.4%) are "baby boomers" in the age group from 26 through 40.

About two out of five (42.5%) of the New Nazarenes have immediate family members in the church. Over half (55%) have close friends within the group.

The majority (61.7%) of the New Nazarenes have been participating in their congregations for at least three years. Almost half (47.1%) have been involved from three to five years.

Almost two-thirds of the New Nazarenes are involved in Worship Services (62.1%) and Sunday School (65.2%). On the other hand, one in four (27.6%) are not involved in "service in the church" and most (56.4%) are not involved in "outreach service".

Half (53.0%) are perceived by their pastors to be growing in grace. Another 36.3% are said to have a stable faith.

CONCLUSIONS

This is intended to be the first in an annual series of reports on the New Nazarenes who joined the Church of the Nazarene during the 1989 assembly year. During 1989, the denomination added 28,644 New Nazarenes to the membership in the United States and Canada. In the decade which ended that year 286,339 New Nazarenes joined the church. In the speculation about the impact of such a large group on the total of 569,466 Nazarenes in those countries, New Nazarenes amounting to 50.3% of the total, some have assumed that all would persist at least through the first decade.

Data have not been available to examine this, or other, assumptions. The results of this study of the first year cannot address all of the important questions regarding typical membership experiences of New Nazarenes. However, the research project should increase in value as this cohort of members progresses through their membership career. With the information gained over time, denominational and local church leaders may be better able to improve ministries to increase the proportion of evangelism fruit which lasts.

The high rate of participation by pastors of the sample must be commended. A study of this nature could not succeed without their investment of valuable time and insight. Those of us conducting the study are praying that an annual evaluation of the progress of this cohort of New Nazarenes will have some direct value for their congregations. And we are praying that as time goes by the results of the study will help many pastors and congregations to improve their conservation of the fruit of evangelism.

Several conclusions are possible after the first year. Some attrition occurs very quickly. Six (.5%) of these members had already been removed from the membership, even though the Manual would not allow this. Ten (.8%) died during their first year of Nazarene membership.

During the first year a significantly higher proportion (19.7%) were already inactive. Unless renewal the spiritual and congregational relationships takes place, it might be expected that these members have already taken the first steps toward loss of membership.

On the other hand, a large proportion are active in the church. Most have a stable or growing in spiritual maturity. Many have close relationships with other members which should strengthen their relationship with the church.

There is, however, much still to be learned about typical New Nazarenes. The first year of this longitudinal study should prove to be at least as valuable for its establishment of baseline data as it is for the insights in can give into the beginnings of membership in the denomination.

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