



John Wesley, 1703-1791
Founder of Methodist Movement

OUR WESLEYAN-HOLINESS HERITAGE

The Church of the Nazarene confesses itself to be a branch of Christ's "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" church, embracing as its own the history of God's people recorded in the Old and New Testaments and by God's people through the ages, in whatever expression of Christ's church they are found. It receives the ecumenical creeds of the first five Christian centuries as expressions of its own faith.

It identifies with the historic church in preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, maintaining a ministry of apostolic faith and practice, and instilling the disciplines of Christlike living and service. It joins the saints in heeding the biblical call to holy living and entire devotion to God, which it proclaims through the theology of entire sanctification.

Our Christian heritage was mediated through the 16th-century English Reformation and 18th-century Wesleyan revival. Through the preaching of John and Charles Wesley, people throughout England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales turned from sin and were empowered for Christian service.

This revival was characterized by lay preaching, testimonies, discipline, and circles of earnest disciples known as “societies,” “classes,” and “bands.” The Wesleyan revival’s theological landmarks included: justification by grace through faith; sanctification, or Christian perfection, likewise by grace through faith; and the witness of the Spirit to the assurance of grace.

John Wesley’s distinctive contributions included an emphasis on entire sanctification as God’s gracious provision for the Christian life. His emphases were disseminated worldwide. In North America, the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1784 “to reform the Continent, and to spread scriptural Holiness over these Lands.”

A renewed emphasis on Christian holiness developed in the mid-19th century. Timothy Merritt of Boston, Massachusetts, spurred interest as editor of the *Guide to Christian Perfection*. Phoebe Palmer of New York City led the Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness and became a sought-after speaker, author, and editor. In 1867 Methodist preachers J. A. Wood, John Inskip, and others, at Vineland, New Jersey, initiated the first in a long series of holiness camp meetings that renewed the Wesleyan quest for holiness around the world.

Christian holiness was emphasized by Wesleyan Methodists, Free Methodists, the Salvation Army, and certain Mennonites, Brethren, and Quakers. Evangelists carried this movement to Germany, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, India, and Australia. New holiness churches arose, including the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana). Holiness churches, urban missions, and missionary associations grew from this endeavor. The Church of the Nazarene was born from the impulse to unite many of these into one holiness church.

Unity In Holiness

Fred Hillery organized the People’s Evangelical Church (Providence, Rhode Island) in 1887. The Mission Church (Lynn, Massachusetts) followed in 1888. In 1890 they and eight other New England congregations formed the Central Evangelical Holiness Association. Anna S. Hanscome, ordained in 1892, was the first ordained female minister in the Nazarene lineage.

In 1894-95, William Howard Hoople organized three holiness congregations in Brooklyn, New York, which formed the Association of Pentecostal Churches of America. “Pentecostal” was a synonym for “holiness” to these and other Nazarene founders. Hillery and Hoople’s groups merged in 1896, established work in India (1899) and Cape Verde (1901). Missions executive Hiram Reynolds organized congregations in Canada (1902). The group reached from Nova Scotia to Iowa by 1907.

Robert Lee Harris organized the New Testament Church of Christ (Milan, Tennessee) in 1894. Mary Lee Cagle, his widow, spread it into west Texas in 1895. C. B. Jernigan organized the first Independent Holiness Church (Van Alstyne, Texas) in 1901. These churches merged at Rising Star, Texas (1904), forming the Holiness Church of Christ. By 1908, it stretched from Georgia to New Mexico, ministering to outcasts and the needy, supporting orphans and unwed mothers, and connecting with workers in India and Japan.

Phineas F. Bresee and Joseph P. Widney, with about 100 others, organized the Church of the Nazarene at Los Angeles in 1895. They held that Christians sanctified by faith should follow Christ's example and preach the gospel to the poor. They believed that their time and money should be given to Christlike ministries for the salvation of souls and the relief of the needy. The Church of the Nazarene spread chiefly along the West Coast of the United States, with some congregations as far east as Illinois. They supported an indigenous mission in Calcutta, India.

In October 1907, the Association of Pentecostal Churches of America and the Church of the Nazarene jointly convened in Chicago, Illinois, to fashion a church government that balanced superintendency with congregational rights. Superintendents were to foster and care for established churches, organize and encourage new churches, but not interfere with the independent actions of a fully organized church. Holiness Church of Christ delegates participated. The First General Assembly adopted a name drawn from both organizations: Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. Bresee and Reynolds were elected general superintendents.

In September 1908, the Pennsylvania Conference of the Holiness Christian Church, under H. G. Trumbaur, united with the Pentecostal Nazarenes. On October 13, the Second General Assembly convened at Pilot Point, Texas, with the General Council of the Holiness Church of Christ to unite the two churches.

Led by J. O. McClurkan, the Pentecostal Mission formed in Nashville in 1898, uniting holiness people from Tennessee and adjacent states. They sent pastors and teachers to Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico, and India. In 1906 George Sharpe was ejected from Parkhead Congregational Church in Glasgow, Scotland, for preaching the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian holiness. The Parkhead Pentecostal Church was formed, other congregations organized, and the Pentecostal Church of Scotland was founded in 1909. The Pentecostal Mission and Pentecostal Church of Scotland united with the Pentecostal Nazarenes in 1915.

The Fifth General Assembly (1919) changed the denomination's official name to Church of the Nazarene. The word "Pentecostal" was no longer synonymous with the doctrine of holiness as it had been in the late 19th century when the founders originally adopted the name of the church. The young denomination remained true to its original mission of preaching the gospel of full salvation.

