

1-1-2008

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### Recommended Citation

McIntosh, G. L. (2008). The Impact of Donald A. McGavran's Church Growth Missiology on the Church of the Nazarene. *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, 19(1), 45-65. Retrieved from <https://digitalarchives.apu.edu/jascg/vol19/iss1/5>

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**The Impact of Donald A. McGavran's Church Growth  
Missiology on the Church of the Nazarene**

**Gary L. McIntosh**

*On February 23, 2004 I interviewed Bill Sullivan by phone regarding the development of the Church Growth Movement in the Church of the Nazarene. The interview was recorded, transcribed, and then sent to Dr. Sullivan for his review. After receiving his edits, I wrote the following history of how Donald A. McGavran's Church Growth missiology impacted the Church of the Nazarene. As the reader will discover, Bill Sullivan was the primary architect of translating Church Growth theory into action within this denomination.*

Traces of Nazarene lineage go back to the English reformation and Methodism. However, the immediate context that gave birth to the Church of the Nazarene was the holiness movement in the United States during the late 1800s. A spiritual lethargy following the American Civil War of the 1860s caused alarm among church leaders throughout the United States. Calls for a return to scriptural holiness soon were heard across the country. The Methodists were particularly concerned due to their "calling to win converts and establish holiness" (Olmstead 1960:451). In an effort to revive a spiritually sick church, Methodists in the Northern portion of the United States founded the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness in 1867. The holiness movement was interdenominational in its makeup, but mostly comprised of evangelical denominations. Several holiness associations sprung up around the United States during this time period, being eventually united through the First General Holiness Assembly of 1885 (1960:452). These holiness associations eventually formed separate denominations toward the end of the 1800s.

A complex set of mergers led to the denomination known as the Church of the Nazarene. Olmstead declares, "The most im-

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Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, Fall 2005

portant holiness body to emerge during this period was the Church of the Nazarene which grew out of the union of three smaller sects" (1960:452). The three holiness sects were the Church of the Nazarene, the Association of the Pentecostal Churches of America, and the Holiness Church of Christ.

The Church of the Nazarene was founded in Los Angeles, California, by Phineas F. Bresee in 1895. Minutes of the organizational meeting for the First Church of the Nazarene reveal an early commitment to evangelism and holiness.

Feeling clearly called of God to the carrying on of His work in the conversion of sinners, the sanctification of believers and the building up in holiness of those who may be committed to our care we associate ourselves together as a Church of God under the name of the Church of the Nazarene (Benefiel 2004).

The Church of the Nazarene began with a concern to model the simplicity of the early New Testament Church, as well as a burden to reach the city. "The field of labor to which we feel called is in the neglected quarters of the cities and wherever else may be found wastelands and souls seeking pardon and cleansing from sin" (2004).

From this beginning, the Church of the Nazarene grew through a series of mergers. Tracy and Ingersol report, "The Church of the Nazarene emerged as a union of various Wesleyan-Holiness denominations and by 1915 embraced seven previously separate North American and British bodies" (Tracy and Ingersol 1999). The name selected for the new church was The Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. But in 1919 the denomination removed the word "Pentecostal" in order to disassociate from other Pentecostal groups that practiced speaking in tongues.

The sociological makeup of the general holiness movement and the Church of the Nazarene came from people found in rural parts of the United States, mostly middle-west and southern states. "Its source of membership was to a considerable extent from the lower social and economic classes who felt a sense of dissatisfaction with the current order and who registered that feeling at least partially by disassociating themselves with churches which they deemed worldly" (Olmstead 1960:453). This social-economic makeup proved to be a blessing during the depression years of the 1930s and the 1940s. The Church of the Nazarene found itself able to communicate extremely well to people going through economic and spiritual distress. The denomination "presented a strongly evangelistic and revivalistic

message in a decade which was experiencing a dearth of revivals." During a time period when denominational growth slowed, the "membership of the Church of the Nazarene, . . . climbed from 63,558 to 136,227 in the decade of 1926-1936, an increase of 114 per cent" (1960:564). Numerical growth became a sign of God's blessing, as well as a source of denominational pride.

The Church of the Nazarene first became concerned regarding a decrease in annual growth in the early 1970s. Bill Sullivan,\* recently retired Director of the Division of Church Growth, wrote about this growing concern in 1985.

The denomination had come to expect substantial increases in membership. Even though mainline churches had been experiencing losses for several years, Nazarene growth had remained vigorous and satisfying. It was interpreted as an indication of divine favor. Indeed, it was understood as proof that God had raised up the Church of the Nazarene and was blessing its work. Statistical success was important to Nazarenes. Most of them had come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and their institutional self-image was greatly bolstered by the denomination's numerical success (1985:1).

As annual reports from the local churches began to highlight the slowdown of church growth in North America, denominational leaders reacted in shock and disbelief. "In 1977 the annual growth rate for domestic areas slipped to 1.19 percent, the lowest ever" (1985:2). It took time for church leaders to accept the increasing trends of non-growth, but once the slowdown of growth was admitted, leaders urgently began searching for ways to restore momentum. Thus, the Church of the Nazarene was receptive to the introduction of church growth insights into the denominational structure in the 1970s; in fact they were actively searching for a way to turn around the frightening course toward non-growth.

#### *The Early Years of Church Growth*

Church Growth thought first made inroads into the Church of the Nazarene through the ministry of Paul Orjala in the early 1960s. Orjala had served as a missionary in Haiti under the General Board of the Church of the Nazarene, and had met and befriended Donald McGavran in 1961. Orjala became professor of mission at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri in 1965 and taught there for over twenty years.

It was during this same time period that Orjala sought to persuade John Knight, who was the Evangelism Director for the

denomination, and Ray Hurn, who was the Home Missions Director, to become involved in Church Growth. However, Knight was more interested in Evangelism Explosion, and eventually introduced that ministry to the Church of the Nazarene. It was Hurn who picked up on Church Growth and introduced its principles to the denomination through the Department of Home Missions.

In 1975, Bill Sullivan became district superintendent in North Carolina and within a few months realized he needed help. Sullivan had read about Robert Schuller's leadership conference in Southern California and decided to take one of the pastors from the North Carolina district to Schuller's seminar in Garden Grove, California in the spring of 1976.

At Schuller's conference, Sullivan heard C. Peter Wagner speak and said, "I've got to talk with that man" (Sullivan 2004). He later found Wagner in the courtyard of the Garden Grove Community Church and told him, "I really need help in North Carolina" (2004). Although Wagner did not have time to talk in depth, he promised to write Sullivan in a few days. After corresponding with Sullivan, Wagner sent John Wimber, then Director of the Fuller Evangelistic Association, to North Carolina. Sullivan later wrote about his encounter with Wimber. "In 1976 I met John Wimber at the airport in Asheville, N.C. It was the beginning of a consulting relationship with Fuller Evangelistic Association and a time of learning church growth principles and strategies" (1988:9). Wimber spoke at the mid-year pastor's retreat in North Carolina, and became a consultant with the district for the next two years. Putting into practice the missiological insights of church growth during 1976 to 1978 proved beneficial to the North Carolina District as membership in Nazarene churches increased to 4,873, a net gain of 467 new members. More importantly there was an increase of 2,017 new Nazarenes, and giving also increased forty-two percent (Wiseman 2002a:9).

"While Orjala . . . brought the whole Church Growth idea to the Church of the Nazarene, Ray Hurn was the person who actually orchestrated the introduction of it" to the denomination (Sullivan 2004). Hurn, Executive Director of the Department of Home Missions, hired Wagner and Wimber for a day of consultation in fall 1977 to talk with him about church growth and the Church of the Nazarene. Together the three of them mapped out a strategy for introducing Church Growth to the entire denomination.

Their strategy involved the following. First, they trained all of the district superintendents in fall 1977 and spring 1978 in basic church growth concepts. Wagner and Wimber taught at

these events, which were the first official introduction of Church Growth to the denomination. Second, Hurn purchased the training packet "A Church Growth Diagnostic Clinic" (1977) from Fuller Evangelistic Association and distributed it to the district superintendents who attended the training events. This was a seminar and notebook developed around Wagner's resource book *Your Church Can Grow*. Each of the district executives took the seminar manuals back to their districts to use in training their pastors. Third, following these initial training events for district superintendents, Hurn hosted another session with all district superintendents in Vail, Colorado. At the Vail conference Hurn invited representatives from the Nazarene seminary, colleges, and Bible schools to participate. Fourth, following the Vail Conference Hurn started a Church Growth Scholars Symposium to train representatives from the Nazarene Seminary, colleges, and Bible schools in church growth principles. The main goal of the symposium was to get Church Growth classes into the seminary and colleges. Sullivan remembers, "I was made the District Superintendent's representative because I was the only other district superintendent that was taking training at Fuller. . . . The scholars were always pretty skeptical about Church Growth," Sullivan recalls. "They didn't like the homogeneous principle and they didn't like the emphasis on numbers" (2004). In spite of these concerns Orjala, Don Owens, Terry Reed, Sullivan (adjunct), and Lyle Pointer taught Church Growth at the Nazarene Theological Seminary. Fifth, in 1978, *Get Ready to Grow* by Paul R. Orjala, the first book on Church Growth for the Church of the Nazarene, was released as a denomination-wide Christian service training tool. "That was the book that really brought Church Growth to the Church of the Nazarene because it was a denomination-wide Christian Service training course" (Sullivan 2004).

Hurn wrote the following in the foreword to Orjala's book:

It is our hope that every church will find a workable philosophy of church growth and recognize clearly the difference between what is true church growth and what is not. A further aim has been to help us discover how the concepts of church management, evangelism, discipleship, and body life contribute to genuine church growth.

Toward this end, the Department of Home Missions has been engaged in extensive research since 1973, seeking the reasons for successful church growth as well as the reasons for the failure of churches that have died. We are now ready to reap the fruit of that research (Hurn in Orjala 1978:7).

Each year the Church of the Nazarene published a book as a Christian service guide that was studied throughout the entire denomination. Orjala's book was used as a denomination-wide Christian service training (CST) course in 1978 and sold over 55,000 copies, the largest selling Christian service guidebook ever sold. CST was used primarily in the USA, although it was a denomination wide study (Sullivan 2004).

Hurn also hired Win Arn to conduct seminars, and in the process they became good friends. It is difficult to document specifically, but Sullivan remembers, "Dr. Hurn took a lot from Win" (Sullivan 2004). Arn would produce his films so that denominational executives could be filmed and then inserted into the finished product. In this way films were easily modified into denominational versions. Hurn purchased Arn's church planting films and appeared personally at the beginning and end of each one (2004).

While Wimber was consulting with the North Carolina District, he encouraged Sullivan to begin studying Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary. In January 1977 Sullivan went to Pasadena, California to take Wagner's Doctor of Ministry course Church Growth I. Arn and Winter both lectured in the course. When Sullivan arrived on the first day of class, he was surprised to find Hurn was also there taking the class, along with another Nazarene, Lyle Pointer. The three of them developed a bond around Church Growth thought that continues to bear fruit even today. The class bore fruit in the lives of these men, but the impact of church growth training on Sullivan was specifically noted by McGavran in a letter to Wagner: "Your education, Pete, of the Nazarenes is bearing very good fruit in every way. They are off and running. I had a district superintendent from North Carolina, Bill Sullivan, who is training 200-300 Class Three leaders. When he gets done, his 54 congregations will start to reproduce themselves in a big way" (McGavran 1979:1).

#### *Division of Church Growth*

In February 1979 the Director of Evangelism, Don Gibson, resigned his position and in 1980 Sullivan was elected to fill the vacancy. Prior to electing Sullivan as Director of Evangelism, the General Board determined that Church Growth belonged in the Department of Evangelism rather than the Department of Home Missions. Knowing that Sullivan was pursuing a Doctor of Ministry in Church Growth studies at Fuller Theological Seminary aided in his election to this position. However, Hurn did not want to lose Church Growth from his department, so an appeal was made to the General Board who eventually moved Church

Growth back to the Department of Home Missions.

Building on their friendship, Hurn and Sullivan worked together to integrate church growth thinking into the entire Church of the Nazarene. Over the following two years, the General Board restructured the headquarters staff. By January 1981, Sullivan was elected as Director of the new Division of Church Growth, with Hurn placed in charge of Church Extension. Consequently, Hurn began focusing on church planting seminars. Kent Anderson, pastor of First Church of the Nazarene, Eugene, Oregon, started teaching church planting seminars, while Hurn wove in church growth principles. At the time, Kent was spearheading an intense church planting effort in the Oregon Pacific District for the Church of the Nazarene. His endeavors were featured in Arn's magazine *Church Growth: America*. In 1983 Kent made two presentations at Arn's Advanced Growth Seminar in Pasadena, California on the topics of Why We Don't Plant Churches Anymore and The Doctrine of the Harvest (Anderson 1983) Unfortunately, while Anderson was a good thinker and strategist, he was considered somewhat out of touch with local church pastors. "His ideas were just too far out. You couldn't make them happen" (Sullivan 2004). Eventually the Board of General Superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene began receiving complaints from some of the district superintendents that too many church planting conferences were being offered, and the board told Hurn to curtail his seminars and conferences. This action by the General Board broke the momentum of Church Growth in the denomination. By 1985 Hurn resigned and moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado to teach at the Nazarene Bible College. Following his departure, Mike Estep was hired to take his place and served for eight years as Director of Church Planting. The district superintendents became upset over Hurn's resignation, and started a movement to elect him as General Superintendent of the denomination. In Anaheim, California during June of 1985, Hurn was elected as General Superintendent of the denomination, and served in that position for eight years before retiring. Having a Church Growth person as the head of the denomination was strategic in allowing church growth ideas to move forward in the denomination's plans and programs.

When Sullivan became Director of the Division of Church Growth, he asked Dale Jones, a part-time statistician hired earlier by Hurn, to start a research department. Jones became head of the new Department of Research for the Church of the Nazarene in 1983. After the Department of Research was established, Sullivan told Jones, "As Director of Church Growth, I think that



means that they want this department to help the church grow. We've got to make a study and see where we are and what's going on" (2004). Hence, for one of his first assignments, Sullivan asked Jones to conduct a study of the Church of the Nazarene to see where they were and what was going on as a denomination. Two of the major questions addressed in the study were "Which districts are growing?" and "Why are they growing?" Out of this study came the discovery that when districts grow larger than seventy-five churches, their rate of growth slows way down. This study became Sullivan's dissertation at Fuller Theological Seminary titled, "Creating New Districts in the Church of the Nazarene as a Strategy for Growth" (1985).

A special emphasis was placed on church growth for the worldwide Church of the Nazarene between September 1984 and August 1985. "THE YEAR OF CHURCH GROWTH is to be one of special growth. Actually, the church should grow every year. But September 1984 through August 1985 is a time of particular emphasis on the numerical expansion of the church," Sullivan wrote. "The Year of Church Growth has been planned as a time when the worldwide Church of the Nazarene will be particularly intentional in its growth efforts. We are challenged with goals of 75,000 new Nazarenes and a [USA] membership of 750,000." The underlying reason for focusing on church growth was not numbers, as Sullivan related. "This goal has been adopted, not just so the church will be bigger, but so life in the Kingdom can be experienced and enjoyed by the greatest number of people" (1984:6).

A statistical analysis of Nazarene Churches in 1983 discovered that "nearly 90 percent have fewer than 200 members. Indeed over half of the churches have fewer than 75 members" (Sullivan 1984:15). Thus, while completing his study of the Nazarene Church, Sullivan became interested in the challenge of churches growing larger than two hundred in size. After conducting further research to see what factors caused churches to remain below two hundred, as well as how churches effectively broke the two hundred barrier, he published *Ten Steps to Breaking the 200 Barrier* (1988). In 1988 the proto-type of a new denominational magazine, *GROW: A Journal for the Development of Missional Leaders & Missional Churches*, was distributed at the General Assembly. The magazine promoted church growth thinking by highlighting the stories of growing churches, as well as by presenting growth insights and trends from recent research (Wiseman 2002b:17).

"I would say there was a lot of Church Growth interest . . . up to about '85," Sullivan recalls, "but there was so much nega-

tivism that emerged in the church in the early and mid-80s that we went through a kind of black out period from about '85 to '90" (Sullivan 2004). Fortunately, some of the negative leaders retired or bowed out, and the morale turned around. "In the fall of 1993," Sullivan remembers, "the General Superintendent said, 'Bill, would you put a training program [together] for the Board of General Superintendents like you've done for the K-Church pastors?' I said 'Yes, because we'd already had requests to begin a program for District Superintendents'" (Sullivan 2004). From that time on, the Division of Church Growth facilitated church growth training for the six General Superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene. This training became known as the Columbia Project. It is the executive development for the Board of General Superintendents, and has been going on for twelve years (1993-2004). Sullivan states, "The District Superintendent's Leadership Development program is still going and that has been heavy Church Growth [teaching]" (2004).

After several years of directing the Division of Church Growth, Sullivan concluded, "If we're going to get the church growing, we've got to teach pastors church growth principles and how to grow" (2004). As he observed seminars, he came to feel that the enthusiasm generated by most seminars and conferences only lasted about six weeks. He noted, in fact, that several denominations had attempted training seminars to help smaller churches grow, but had abandoned seminars because they just could not make them work. Since very little long-term results were generated from attending seminars, Sullivan felt it would be necessary to break pastors and church members out of their normal routines if growth was to be accomplished. He also concluded that the Church of the Nazarene needed more large churches.

#### *Church Size Strategies*

Out of that thinking came a new direction called "Church Size Strategies" in 1989, which focused church growth training into three categories. The Small Church Institute was designed for churches with just a few members, up to one hundred members in size. The Intermediate Church Initiative was developed for churches between 100 and 250 in size, and the K Church Project was organized for churches with 250 to 1000 members. Dale Jones, manager of the Church Growth Research Center, wrote regarding church size strategies,

For years pastors commented that Headquarters had "one-size-fits-all" policies for churches. Recently, Church Growth has developed specific strategies for dif-

ferent sized congregations. This concept recognizes that churches have different needs depending on size. What works for a church of 125 is not necessarily helpful for a church of 500 . . . or a church of 40.

The goal remains the same . . . help each congregation become an effective center of evangelism and holiness within its community. But more closely tailor the emphasis to match the need of the congregation.

To help all our churches grow, the Church Growth Division has designed three church size strategies which are in active operation across the denomination.

1. The Small Church Institute. The goal for 0 to 99 size churches is to help them grow to 100. . . . In this category are 65.9% of our churches and 29.2% of our members attend these churches.

2. Intermediate Church Initiative. The goal for 100 to 249 size churches is to break the 200 barrier. This is the most difficult growth restriction any church faces. . . . Only 12.4% of Nazarene churches are above 200. . . . In this category are 25.8% of our churches and 36.9% of our church members attend these churches.

3. K-Church Project. The goal for this strategy is for 250 and up size churches to grow to 1000. . . . In this category are 8.3% of our churches and 33.9% of our church members attend these churches (Jones 1993:41).

The Church Size Strategies developed by the Division of Church Growth was based on three principles.

*The Principle of Delivery*

First was the principle of delivery. The bottom line is this: if training cannot be delivered to the pastors, it will not work. How the denomination delivers training is a fundamental foundation of the Church Size Strategies. Most pastors of smaller churches do not have the time nor the money to go to seminars. Many are bivocational and cannot take a day off to attend a training seminar or conference. Thus, training must be taken to the small church pastor, rather than expecting the pastor to come to a denominational training event. Consequently, for small churches a national training conference was designed to train one or more representatives from each district. Representatives were invited to the conference to be trained in four lessons on how to grow a church. A master teacher taught the material, after which each

participant received a video of the presentation. They received a notebook with all of the lesson materials, including ten color transparencies per lesson, for a total of forty overhead transparencies. The representatives then returned to their respective districts and began teaching the four lessons in church growth to their pastors.

In the Intermediate Church Initiative, the key is to deliver the training to the lay leadership. While pastors of intermediate sized churches could be easily trained, the barrier to church growth was that the pastors could not gain ownership of growth ideas among their leaders after returning to their churches. Lay leaders blocked the growth of the church. To help pastors of intermediate sized churches overcome this growth barrier training videos were developed by the Division of Church Growth. Pastors were then invited to group meetings of six pastors. One of the pastors was selected to be a lead pastor. At the group meetings, they would watch a video and learn how to use it to teach the lay leaders in their churches. Learning materials were provided along with the video. Later the pastors would take a video and material back to their churches and train their lay leaders. This training was offered four times a year.

The K Church Project was the easiest one to deliver because the pastors of the larger churches had the money and time to attend a training event. Thus, a School of Large Church Management was established to train pastors in how to manage a large ministry. Robert Kreitner, a nationally known professor and author on leadership management, was hired to teach the management course.

#### *The Principle of Process*

The second principle on which the Church Size Strategies was based was that of process. People do not change by going to one seminar. It takes a process of regular training to begin to change pastors and church leaders. For example, K Church pastors attended training twice a year for three years. The principle of process was also developed in the Small Church Institute and Intermediate Church Initiative, as ongoing training was offered to gradually change the thinking of pastors and people.

#### *The Principle of Networking*

People learn best from each other as they meet and talk together about their challenges, struggles, and attempts to see growth happen in their churches. Thus, regular times of networking were designed into each church size strategy to enable pastors an opportunity to learn from and support each other in

the total process.

The K Church Project has been the most successful, as far as measurable results are concerned. In the first eighty years of existence, the Church of the Nazarene saw only twelve churches reach an attendance or membership of one thousand or more people. However, through the K Church Project, the total number of churches over one thousand in attendance doubled to twenty-four in eight years. As of 2004, there were forty-three churches with an attendance and/or membership of one thousand or more. Understandably, the K Church Project has become the “in” thing, and the denomination began its sixth three-year cycle in January 2004. In the first cycle, there were sixty-three pastors participating, one hundred fifteen in the second cycle, eighty-five in the third, seventy-five in the fourth, and seventy in track five.

*The Association of Nazarene Sociologists and Researchers*

The Association of Nazarene Sociologists and Researchers (ANSR) was established in 1981 with the goal of providing leaders with accurate information so they could make good decisions. In 1980 Sullivan met John Johnston, a Nazarene and Professor of Sociology at Pepperdine University, and asked him to help the Church Growth Division begin an Association of Sociologists of Religion. The Association has met annually for twenty-five years. Each year a well-known sociologist or church leader is invited to speak. Examples of past lecturers include Tony Campolo, John Savage, Martin Marty, Robert Bellah, and Carl Dudley. They also sponsor ANSR Poll, an occasional research project of a Nazarene sample. Participation is open to persons who are interested in research related to Nazarene church growth.

The purpose statement of the ANSR states in part, “We propose to generate that kind of sociological research which provides valid information related to those subject areas that our Denomination considers to be especially helpful in better fulfilling its God-Ordained mission” (Association of Nazarene Sociologists and Researchers 2004:1). The Nazarene Research Center which started under Hurn’s initiative and developed under Sullivan’s leadership, continues to analyze and publish results in *GROW: A Journal for the Development of Missional Leaders & Missional Churches*, as well as on the Internet at [www.nazareneresearch.org](http://www.nazareneresearch.org).

*NewStart*

Early in the 1990s, Jones was assigned to complete a study

on the more than seven hundred church plants the Church of the Nazarene had started during the previous decade. The study was completed in 1991 and revealed that only seven percent of the new church plants had grown beyond eighty worshipers. This prompted further research on the few new churches that had experienced significant growth.

Additional research discovered that new churches produced the most growth. Jones reported, "Churches organized within the last five years produced 49% of the net membership growth in Canada and the United States last year. And those begun since 1977 accounted for 63% of the net growth in members from 1992 to 1993" (1994:60). This prompted further research on the few new churches that had experienced significant growth. After completing the research, Sullivan began to think about a new strategy for church planting and approached the Director of Church Planting, Mike Estep, to see what could be done. However, Estep was elected to become Director of Communications and left the church planting position in the fall of 1993. Sullivan decided to take direct charge of the church planting department and instituted a new approach to church planting called NewStart.

NewStart was launched in fall 1995 through a series of Pastors and Leaders Conferences (PALCONS). Out of those regional conferences, Sullivan drafted a strategy, passed it among the district superintendents for revision, and wrote a book titled, *Starting Strong New Churches the Right Way* (1997). Sullivan states, "My first love is large churches, but my passion is new churches" (2004). In the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s the Church of the Nazarene had started 1500 to 1700 new churches per decade. But in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, they started less than half that number a decade, or about seven hundred churches every ten years. The NewStart strategy challenged leaders to plant one thousand churches a decade. As of 2003, for the first time since 1955, over one hundred churches were planted in one year.

#### *Breckenridge*

The Church Growth Scholars Symposium begun in the late 1970s was changed to a new event called "Breckenridge." Modeled after the Camp David Accord organized by President Jimmy Carter, Breckenridge was an attempt to actually change the nature of clergy preparation. While some headway had been made in integrating Church Growth courses in the seminary and colleges, it was felt more could be done. The Church Growth Scholars Symposium normally involved only ten or twelve peo-

ple; Breckenridge was to involve thirty to forty people in wider discussion concerning ministerial preparation. Two or three scholars from each school, a few district superintendents, a few pastors, and a few laypersons from key churches were brought together at Breckenridge, Colorado to talk about ministerial education in the Church of the Nazarene. In the 1997 assembly of the Church of the Nazarene several changes in ministerial education were adopted which are still being implemented. Researchers Charles Crow and Kenneth Crow note that "Most, if not all, of our schools now have at least one class in 'Church Growth' being offered as a part of their ministerial preparation program" due in large part to Breckenridge and the earlier Church Growth Scholars Symposium (2001:1).

*McGavran's Church Growth Missiology*

McGavran's missiological principles created a major impact on the growth strategies of the Church of the Nazarene. Most prominent is the commitment of the denomination to McGavran's concept of removing the fog through research. This is seen in a number of ways in the denomination. First, in 1981 Ray Hurn and Bill Sullivan established a Research Department in the Church of the Nazarene. Dale Jones was appointed director and by the year 2000, five people were working in the Department of Research. The purpose of the department was to discover trends that could be used to help Nazarene Churches grow. Bill Sullivan wanted the new research department to "keep us statistically honest" at Nazarene headquarters (Sullivan 2004). Second, to support the department of research, the ANSR was founded in 1980. This organization was started to give research a prominent place in the Church of the Nazarene, as well as to provide a measure of respect and encouragement to Nazarene researchers. The ANSR is "made up of people who are interested in social research and the Church of the Nazarene. . . . The primary goal of the organization is to generate research which may serve the church" (Crow 2004). Third, was the founding of *GROW* magazine in 1988. While research is a key factor in developing evangelism strategy, in order to be effective, the research had to be communicated to local church leaders. *GROW* magazine became the key communication link between the Department of Research and the people in the congregations.

Related to research is the establishing of bold plans based on the findings. One of the first studies the Department of Research conducted found that when denominational districts grew larger than seventy-five churches, the district's rate of growth decreased. This discovery led to a bold plan to create new districts

in the Church of the Nazarene as a strategy for growth, which was the focus on Bill Sullivan's Doctor of Ministry study (Sullivan 1985). In addition the entire denomination selected 1984-1985 as the "Year of Church Growth" with the bold goal of adding seventy-five thousand new Nazarenes to membership rolls during that year. Other goals were made to increase the total number of churches with over one thousand people in average attendance, and to plant one thousand new churches a decade through the NewStart program.

Another of McGavran's missiological insights was being accountable for making disciples. This too found acceptance in the Church of the Nazarene. Regular reports are presented in *GROW* magazine that provide specific facts on how the Church of the Nazarene is doing in fulfilling its goals and mission. Articles frequently employ the use of statistics, charts, and graphs to visualize the results of research. Trends are analyzed and presented warts and all. Reports include studies of the various sizes of churches, the total number of numerical gains in a given year, comparison of Nazarene worshippers, and the effectiveness of revivals, to name a few examples. Another means of taking account of actual results comes from the ANSR. Articles from researchers have reported the facts on Nazarene growth or decline since 1982. Representative articles include "Church Growth (and Decline) During the 1989 Assembly Year," "Church Growth: Springboard for Conflict?" and "The Effect of the Church Growth Movement on the Church of the Nazarene." These reports are completed as a way to assist the leaders of the Church of the Nazarene in being accountable for results.

Multiplying Churches is still another major aspect of McGavran's missiology that has impacted the Church of the Nazarene. While church planting has always been a focus of the Church of the Nazarene, the application of McGavran's church growth ideas helped spark increased effort in this area of ministry. For example, during the decade of the 1970s, the Church of the Nazarene organized an average of forty-two churches per year. After employing McGavran's missiological insights on multiplying churches, the average number of new churches started rose to sixty-five per year during the decade of the 1980s (Church of the Nazarene 2004). However, after research showed that church planting efforts were declining back to about forty-seven new churches per year in the 1990s, plans were renewed to start one hundred churches a year through NewStart. This also illustrates the way the Church of the Nazarene seeks to follow McGavran's insight on "using correct methods" (i.e., methods that produce results). When they found that the way they were



approaching church planting was not producing results, they reworked their entire church planting strategy.

The Church of the Nazarene readily accepted McGavran's emphasis on valuing the Bible, making disciples, and prioritizing evangelism. These missiological insights were already part of the core values of the Nazarene Church. The mission of the Church of the Nazarene clearly states, "The Church of the Nazarene is a 'Great Commission' church. Our members therefore seek to witness faithfully and attractively to all people so that the life of Christ within the believers will draw others to the love, worship, and service of God." The Church believes that the "Old and New Testaments reveal God's will for all persons concerning sin, salvation, and new life in Christ." While evangelism is the priority of its ministry, the Church of the Nazarene also states, "We are called, especially, to preach the Gospel to the poor" (Tracy and Ingersol 1999). Sullivan summarizes, "The secret of Church Growth is in aggressive evangelism and starting new units, whether it is groups in an existing church or whether its new churches" (2004).

McGavran's other missiological insights were used to develop ministry strategy as well. Bill Sullivan comments, "The other thing I used a lot . . . was the whole idea of receptivity. . . . and when I taught at Seminary, I did a [lecture] on Resistance and Receptivity" (Sullivan 2004). Regarding the principle of "targeting specific people" Sullivan recalls, "I don't talk about the homogeneous unit principles anymore . . . but I do try to build everything with an understanding of that principle. . . . You build your strategies recognizing that that is the way it is going to be (2004).

An assessment of the results of the Church of the Nazarene's use of McGavran's ideas is mostly positive, but somewhat mixed. One report that assessed the impact of the Church Growth Movement declared, "Insights of the Church Growth Movement became more widely known and applied. Still, at the close of the decade most Nazarene congregations remained smaller than seventy-five members and many had failed to grow at all during the period" (Crow 1990). Kenneth Crow surmised that one reason church growth ideas had not resulted in numerical growth for many smaller Nazarene churches was due to conflict. He suggested that when church growth insights were applied to local churches the result was often conflict over facts-based issues, values-based issues, and interest-based issues. The basic problem, according to Crow, was "in our training of ministers and in our programs for the churches we have not given enough warning about, and help for, the conflict which often

accompanies growth" (1990). However, Crow wrote in another report, "Half (49.6%) of the Nazarene churches in the United States and Canada had net gains in membership in 1989. Another 15.4% were stable, experiencing neither gain nor loss. . . . On the other hand, 35.0% of the churches experienced a net membership loss" (1989).

Checking the growth and decline of a denomination according to its decadal growth rate for a number of years provides additional information. This is the standard that has been used in the American Church Growth movement since 1975 (Waymire and Wagner 1984:16). A decadal growth rate represents what "the growth *would have been* for ten years" regardless of the number of years used to figure the results. This allows for a standard formula in determining the rate of growth or decline among differing churches and denominations. While assessing a denomination's decadal growth rate does not answer all questions, it does allow for a standard numerical evaluation. Using this approach, the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada combined has grown in membership by a decadal growth rate of 17.7 percent between 1970 and 2000. Statistics for the United States between 1986 and 2000 show a decadal growth rate of 13.7 percent. Attendance at worship services has increased 19.1 percent per decade in the United States and Canada, and 5.6 percent in the United States alone during the same years. This shows that the Church of the Nazarene did grow significantly during the years in which a strong emphasis on church growth was employed.

One area where McGavran's missiological insights made another significant contribution to the Church of the Nazarene was in the number of churches added during the years 1970 to 2000. Between 1970 and 2000, a total of 1,540 new churches were started, and 1,090 survived, for a survival rate of seventy percent during the entire thirty-year period. However, since 1991, the survival rate of new church starts has topped seventy percent for an average survival rate of 86.5 percent between 1991 and 2000. Since the beginning of the NewStart program, new church starts topped one hundred in a single year for the first time ever in over forty years. The annual report for NewStart in 2004 states, "Since its inception, 878 new Nazarene churches have been registered with the NewStart office. An additional 285 new churches are in the process of being launched and registered in the near future, making the total of new churches 1,163 toward our denominational goal of 1,500 churches . . . in 2008" (Dorsey 2004).

From these different perspectives, it appears that the appli-

cation of McGavran's church growth missiology has made a significant impact in the Church of the Nazarene. Researcher Kenneth Crow concludes, "The Church Growth Movement in the Church of the Nazarene . . . has made some noteworthy contributions to the mission of the church: The church size strategies . . . the Church Growth Scholars Symposium and Breckenridge conferences . . . Demographic analysis . . . ANSR" (Crow and Crow 2001). Dale Jones adds, "The church growth movement, in the form of careful, meticulous, and informed research, has a great influence on the Church of the Nazarene" (2001:8).

#### *Conclusion*

The Church of the Nazarene is an excellent example of a denomination that embraced the American Church Growth movement wholeheartedly. A commitment to research and setting bold plans is a hallmark of McGavran's missiological insights that has been clearly demonstrated over the last three decades in the Church of the Nazarene. Church growth ideas were accepted, taught, resourced, and institutionalized within the denominational structure. While other denominations were declining, the Church of the Nazarene has seen attendance in Canada and the United States of America increase from 460,000 in 1981 to 525,000 in 2004, and is beginning to see a harvest that is likely to continue for years to come. Lyle Pointer, a professor at Nazarene Theological Seminary, writes: "We are experiencing some of the greatest days of numerical growth in the USA with the surge of new churches being planted. By 2008 we will have begun over 2008 churches since 1994" (Pointer 2005:1).

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## NOTES

\* Unless otherwise noted, the information for the story of the American Church Growth movement within the Church of the Nazarene was obtained primarily from interviews with Bill Sullivan. I have chosen not to reference much of this information to Bill Sullivan as a way to allow the story to flow smoothly. Sullivan was Director of the

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Division of Church Growth from 1981 until his retirement in 2003.

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