

SOCIAL MINISTRY AND MAKING DISCIPLES
GENERAL BOARD UCME COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 24, 2007

As you know, denominational statistics tell us that the US/CANADA region's growth is not what we would like it to be. When compared to 2.8% (?) population growth in US/CANADA and the denomination's international growth of 5.8% (?), the 1% (?) "growth" in US/CANADA is a concern, especially given the tremendous wealth, education, and other resources residing in the region.

I know all of us are concerned about this and are seeking God's guidance. I remember clearly last year's meeting of this committee with Tom's "State of the Church" information and our time of prayer. It's been close to the forefront of my mind all year.

We must continue to face this concern head-on and not dodge it, excuse it, or hide from it. Obviously there are significant barriers-many of which I'm sure I don't fully understand-but I do know God is still God, he understands, cares, and is with us to guide and empower.

I believe God has led the Board of General Superintendents in developing our mission statement, "To make Christlike disciples in the nations". I'm greatly encouraged by their leadership. They are carrying the heaviest part of the load. Dr. Porter sent us a letter after last year's board meeting asking that we become people of prayer and focus on making disciples. I've kept that letter and prayed over it often.

While there no doubt are sociological, demographic, cultural, traditional, and perhaps theological issues involved in causing denominational growth, certainly wholelife discipleship with "right side up values in this upside down world" as Tom Sines says is at the heart of renewal and growth. We know wealth, education, organization, and all the trappings of "church-culture" are not the answer. It is disciples, disciples, disciples.

As we think about making disciples in US/CANADA I believe that much of the time we are referring to helping good people- good Nazarenes who love God, attend worship, read their bibles, pray, support the church financially, serve on church boards, and really care about the church- become the deep disciples they want to become.

One major factor, perhaps the **KEY FACTOR**, in making disciples in today's US/CANADIAN culture is to help these wonderful Nazarenes move toward translating their personal holiness into social holiness, toward moving "from the sanctuary to the streets". This important means of grace seems too often to be missing from the daily agenda of many individuals and indeed many local churches. Our lives don't normally intersect with the worlds of hunger, drugs, poverty, prison, HIVAIDS, and other issues that cripple their victims. So we have good people, but people for whom incarnating the gospel outside their life circles is not on their missional screen. Nouwen's "voluntary dislocation" isn't in their mindset.

I believe biblical and historical truth teach us that **along with evangelism as we know it, practical, biblical compassion** extended to the "poverty stricken, sick, hungry, orphaned, imprisoned, of otherwise marginalized of disenfranchised" is integral to, vital to, and indeed **indispensable** to the making of fully Christ-like disciples.

Biblical guidance for this truth comes from such passages as:

- **Isaiah** 58:6-12, "...is not this the fasting I have chosen...to loose the chains of injustice...share your food with the hungry...provide the poor wanderer with shelter...when you see the naked, to clothe him..."
- **Jesus** in Matthew 9:32, 14:14, 15:32, and 20:34 is described in the NIV as having "compassion". Three of those four times he was responding to temporal needs of people.

Dozens of other scriptures confirm God's great compassion for those who are poor, in need, or on the margins of society.

Historical guidance comes from across the centuries.

- **Wesley** scholar Randy Maddox, in a paper entitled “Visit the poor” quotes Wesley who in a proposed Sketch of the Relative Value of the Different Aspects of the Christian Religion says; “In a Christian believer love sets upon the throne...namely love of god and (other humans)...in a circle next to the throne are holy tempers; long suffering, gentleness, meekness (etc.)...**in the next closest exterior circle are all the works of mercy, to the souls or bodies of others by these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that these are real means of grace**, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed works of piety; reading and hearing the word; public, family, private prayer; receiving the Lord’s Supper; fasting and abstinence, lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one—the church”. Two factors are startling about this teaching. First, that the location of works of mercy indicates their relative importance which is prior to works of piety and second that he considers them to be the lynch pin of all the means of grace.
- **Dr. Billy Graham**, in his book, Peace with God, argues that “...Jesus taught that we are to take regeneration in one hand and a cup of cold water in the other...”
- Revivalist **Jonathan Edwards** states that “religious singing, meetings, and prayer will neither promote nor sustain revival in the absence of works of love and mercy, works that will bring the love of God down to earth”.
- **Dr. John A. Knight** in a presentation entitled “Evangelism/Social Responsibility-Siamese Twins”, states, “all of us must commit ourselves, and encourage other believers to commit themselves, to a yet more active fulfillment of our evangelistic and social responsibilities”.
- **Fr. Henri Nouwen**, in his book, Compassion, states that “...we are touching the profound spiritual truth that service is a reflection of our search of God and not just the desire to bring about individual and social change...”
- **Dr. David McKenna**, in describing the 19th century “Free Methodist Church” in his classic book, What a Time to be Wesleyan, states “...at the center of those convictions was the doctrine of entire sanctification, or personal holiness. But the doctrine did not stand alone. Personal holiness was inseparably connected with compassion for the poor that was evidenced, not just by free seats in the churches and advocacy of abolition in the culture, but by risky ventures of self-giving to unwed mother, orphaned children, and homeless men. Suddenly, it dawned upon me, if either personal or social holiness is disconnected from the other, neither makes sense”.

These people are not describing a “works” religion, nor the “social gospel” syndrome. Both would soon turn sour to the practitioners and the recipients. Nor is it a call to replace prayer, searching the Word, fasting, or any other means of grace, with man-made activity. Compassion in fact enhances and enlivens the other means of grace. Nor is this something to try to stuff into an “already impossible schedule”. It is simply living out a core principle of the heart of the gospel, simply asking the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us to live out the compassion of Jesus.

If incarnating the gospel into the margins of society is vital to individual discipleship, then it isn’t something that can be delegated to NCM and NCMInc. In fact there’s a real danger here which must be avoided. NCM and NCMInc can take the lead but they can’t become a substitute for personal involvement. This is a call for **every** US/CANADIAN Christian to incarnate the gospel. It doesn’t matter whether your assignment is local, district, or general and whether its focus is Sunday School, NYI, NMI, etc, all of us are involved.

As individual Christ-followers and as a denomination we must somehow recover the compassion that our historians tell us motivated and led us in the early days of our history. 1895-1925.

Last year at this committee meeting we prayed together asking God to intervene. Then in the plenary session we talked about II Chronicles 7:14 and God’s call to prayer. All year long we’ve been humbling ourselves, praying, and seeking God’s face. I now ask quietly, respectfully, looking deep within myself-and with much trepidation- is the widespread loss of practical Christlike compassion US/CANADA’s “wicked way” from which we are to turn? Is this the “turning from” that God is talking to our day about? Is this where we are?

If so, are we at the next step in US/CANADA? Is now the time to mount a major effort across the entire programmatic spectrum of denominational departments and ministries to move toward saturating the US/CANADIAN church with the spirit of the compassion of Jesus? Should we now focus on trying to place practical compassion alongside evangelism and works of mercy alongside works of piety in the hearts, minds, and everyday agenda of every local church? Should we now focus on doing the same with every General Board member, all headquarters personnel, our District Superintendents, pastors, and laymen in the US/CANADA region?

If so, what are we, the UCME Committee and UCME Department to do? The General Superintendents have given us the overall mission. Is leadership of this part of the mission a legitimate role for us? If not, who should take the lead and how should we support them?

What are some actions we could consider taking? Could we:

- Draft and endorse a “Statement on Practical Christlike Compassion” as it relates to the making of disciples.
- Ask the General Board and General Superintendents to endorse the Statement as entities and individuals.
- Ask our leaders to consider a “Thrust toward Practical Christlike Compassion” across the US/CANADA Region, similar to the “Thrust to the Cities” campaign.
- Ask the Board of General Superintendents to call for a denomination-wide time of fasting and prayer for God’s guidance.
- Ask every District Superintendent, pastor, and local church board member to seek God’s guidance on how they can minister practical Christlike compassion to their communities.
- Ask UCME, NTS, NCM, NCMInc, and ? to consider producing one or a series of seminars on practical Christlike compassion as it relates to disciple making and redemption of the lost.
- Ask districts and local churches to consider starting food and clothing outlets, job training centers, orphanages, tutoring sessions, senior citizen centers, and similar ministries to alleviate suffering in their communities.

A Vision might be to see “Every US/CANADIAN Nazarene make the transition from the sanctuary to their God-called ‘street’, growing in discipleship, and changing their world for Christ. A vibrant, growing body of ‘first century’ Nazarenes, noted for a distinct Jesus-likeness in their love and care of the forgotten.

STATEMENT

We the UCME Committee of the General Board of the Church of the Nazarene, believing that expressing the compassion of Jesus in practical ways to the marginalized of our society is central to the Gospel and integral to the making of disciples, do hereby encourage all our people and churches in the US/CANADA Region to embark on ministries of practical compassion to the poor, widows, orphans, addicted, imprisoned, or otherwise marginalized in their communities as God directs. We believe that taking the fragrance of Jesus through deeds of mercy to persons in need will ease their pain, deepen our discipleship, and bring Glory to our Lord.