**Clergy Aging, Numerical and Financial Summary 2008-2020:**

**The Church of the Nazarene in the Southwest**

**Ron Benefiel and Greg Crow**

**September 2020**

**I Introduction**

The primary purpose of this summary analysis is to assess and learn from the probable effects of denominational statistical trends as they are interrelated with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and the current financial downturn on the life and mission of the Church of the Nazarene for churches on the Southwest Educational Zone. The data presented was provided by the Research Office in the Global Ministry Center.

**II Aging Trends for the Pastoral Cohort**

The pastoral cohort for the Church of the Nazarene in US/Canada is aging. This is mirrored by declines on the Southwest Educational Zone.

**Age of Senior Pastors in US/Canada (Percentage)**

2000 2008 2011 2014 2017 2020\*

Under 30 2.6 2.1 1.8 2.5 2.3 1.4

30-39 17.7 12.7 11.8 11.9 12.0 11.1

40-49 36.2 27.0 22.9 21.4 20.7 21.4

50-59 29.0 34.2 36.1 34.1 31.0 28.3

60-69 13.1 19.6 22.0 23.8 25.7 27.1

70+ 1.4 4.3 5.4 6.4 8.4 10.6

**Age of Senior Pastors in Southwest Educational Zone (Percentage)**

2000 2008 2011 2014 2017 2020

Under 30 1.9 1.9 0.9 1.4 1.1 ---

30-39 15.5 10.4 10.0 11.1 10.3 9.0

40-49 37.1 29.1 22.9 20.4 19.4 19.9

50-59 31.8 35.1 38.3 37.1 33.8 31.6

60-69 12.2 19.5 22.7 23.3 28.2 29.4

70+ 1.5 3.9 5.2 6.8 7.2 9.9

\*Data for 2020 is preliminary and has not yet been finalized by the GMC.

**Analysis:**

1. Comparing data for 2000 to that of 2020, there is a marked decrease of younger senior pastors and a corresponding marked increase of those who are older. In the US/Canada data, those under the age of 40 declined from 20.3% of the senior pastoral cohort to 12.5%. This represents a 38% decline of younger pastors in the total sample. (Southwest decrease is almost 50%). Likewise, those over the age of 60 increased from 14.5% to 37.7%. An increase of nearly 160%. On the Southwest Region, there are now more pastors over the age of 70 than under the age of 40.
2. Much of the increase of older pastors is undoubtedly related to the numerical strength of baby boomers. Twenty years ago, the boomers were in their forties and early fifties which correlates with the number of pastors in those age categories. As boomers have aged into their sixties and early seventies, there has been a corresponding increase of pastors over 60. The increased numbers for the aging boomer cohort is also a likely indication of the aging of laity for many congregations.
3. The millennials are also a large population cohort. So, we would expect the number of senior pastors to be higher for their age group than for other generational cohorts (similar to the Boomer numbers). Apparently, this is not occurring. This may be due to a higher number of younger pastors serving in staff positions or to some who are planting churches that are not yet fully organized. It may also be a reflection of lower levels of religiosity for millennials (i.e. increase in “nones”) as well as being indicative of lower levels of denominational identity and loyalty.
4. With nearly 40% of senior pastors being over the age of 60, there will likely be an unusually large number of senior pastors retiring in the next decade. (Although an increasing number are serving into their seventies.) This raises some questions for future consideration. For example, how will this affect the pool of potential candidates for churches in pastoral transition? To the degree that older pastors/leaders are replaced by those who are younger, there could be a loss of institutional memory. At the same time, younger leaders who move into positions of leadership may bring new ideas of how to develop approaches to ministry that resonate with the changing cultural context. This could result in a tradeoff between institutional identity/loyalty on the one hand and innovation on the other.

**III Numerical Trends for Congregations**

The Church of the Nazarene in the US and Canada has been declining numerically over the past decade. This is also true for churches on the PLNU region. Data from 2008 were selected as the base line for percentage comparison to show change relative to the numerical strength prior to the 2008 recession.

2008 2011 2014 2017 2020 \* (% -- 08)

**US/Canada Average Morning Worship (In Thousands)**

US/Canada 519 507 481 456 425 (-18%)

Southwest 70 72 68 60 55 (-21%)

**Median Congregational Worship Attendance**

US/Canada 60 59 56 52 49 (-18%)

Southwest 67 69 64 57 55 (-18%)

**US/Canada Children’s Discipleship Ministries (In Thousands)**

US/Canada 102 102 98 94 81 (-21%)

Southwest 13.9 14.5 13.9 13.3 10.5 (-24%)

**US/Canada Youth Discipleship Ministries (In Thousands)**

US/Canada 58 65 60 55 49 (-19%)

Southwest 8.7 10.9 9.2 7.9 6.5 (-25%)

**US/Canada -- Primary Language English Congregations**

US/Canada 4351 4295 4251 4217 4174 (-4%)

Southwest 421 414 409 406 402 (-4.5%)

**US/Canada – Primary Language Spanish Congregations**

US/Canada 444 468 534 623 638 (+44%)

Southwest 121 134 169 183 178 (+47%)

**US/Canada – Other (Primary Language) Congregations**

US/Canada 235 239 251 280 296 (+26%)

Southwest 62 67 75 78 82 (+32%)

\*Data for 2020 is preliminary and has not yet been finalized by the GMC.

**Analysis:**

1. Morning Worship Attendance is likely the best single indicator of numerical strength. Most mainline denominations have been showing declines since the 1960’s while evangelical denominations have generally been in decline for about the past 20 years. The decline for the Church of the Nazarene in US/Canada began in 2005 when the average morning worship peaked above 528 thousand. The decline since has generally ranged between 5-10 thousand per year from 2008 to 20016 and between 10-15 thousand per year for the last four years. The median morning worship attendance peaked in 2002 at 65 and has also declined at an average rate of about 1 per year for the past 18 years. The rate of decline in morning worship attendance does not appear to be slowing.
2. Declines in Median Worship Attendance with half of all congregations averaging less than 50 raises questions regarding viability for many congregations.
3. The decrease in the number of children and youth may indicate that there is also a generational replacement issue to consider. As older generational cohorts diminish, they may not be readily replaced by those who are younger.
4. The percent decline in morning worship attendance both for US/Canada and the Southwest would likely be greater if it were not for the notable increase of Spanish language and other immigrant congregations. The number of Spanish language congregations has sharply increased from 271 in 2000 to 638 in 2020. (From 85 to 178 in the Southwest). Other immigrant congregations are showing strong increases as well. This is a growing edge for the church with strong possibilities for the future. (However, there appears to be a recent slowing of the increase at least for Spanish language congregations.) The large number of new Spanish language congregations also contributes to the decrease in median congregational worship attendance.

**IV Financial Trends in Local Congregations (In Millions)**

Local church giving for US/Canada declined sharply for about three years following the 2008 recession. Since then it has leveled off. Once again, this is mirrored by a corresponding decline in the Southwest.

 2008 2011 2014 2017 2020\*

US/Canada 838 737 737 733 727

\*\*CPI adj. (.958) (.902) (.869) (.818)

\*\*\*Adjusted Total 706 665 637 595

\*\*\*\*Percent Change (-14.6%) (-20.6%) (-24.1%) (-29.0%)

Southwest 112 94 94 94 94

\*\*CPI Adj. ( .958) (.902) (.869) (.818)

\*\*\* Adjusted Total 90 85 82 77

\*\*\*\*Percent Change (-19.6%) (-24.1%) (-26.8%) (-31.3%)

CPI Adjusted Median Per Capita Giving

US/Canada 1,616 1,408 1,468 1,398 1,400

Southwest 1,614 1,251 1,237 1,367 1,401

\*The data for 2020 is preliminary and has not yet been finalized by the GMC.

\*\*The US Bureau of Labor calculator was used to establish the CPI adjustment multiplier.

\*\*\*The baseline for the CPI adjustment was set at 2008 to indicate the subsequent strength of giving relative to that which was reported prior to the last recession.

\*\*\*\*The “Percent Change” is CPI percent adjusted total income relative to 2008.

**Analysis:**

1. The 2008 recession obviously had a major impact on financial giving for local congregations. While the economy rebounded over time, financial giving in local congregations leveled off, and when adjusting for the CPI, it continued to decline. The per capita giving adjusted for CPI similarly declined but then remained fairly steady. So, since 2011, people who continued to attend also continued faithfully to give, but because of the decline in attendance, there were fewer who were giving.
2. Generally speaking, adjusting for inflation, the Church has about 70% of the financial resources today compared to 2008 to carry out its mission and fund its operational needs. With this decline in financial resources, many churches are struggling, while others have adjusted to the new financial reality.
3. Some churches may find it increasingly difficult to financially support a pastor. From another data set, 43% of senior pastors in US/Canada in 2019 were bi-vocational. Of full-time senior pastors, the median total financial package (salary, benefits, housing, social security) was less than $45,000.
4. Giving patterns for generational cohorts are higher for Builders and Boomers and lower for Gen X and Millennials. Looking to the future, this may have an additional impact on financial giving in local congregations as older generations are replaced by younger.
5. The current coronavirus crisis will undoubtedly have a major impact on many local congregations. Depending upon the severity and length of the current recession, this could again impact local church giving. If the 2008 recession is an indication, some congregations that are borderline with regard to viability may find it difficult to remain open without making significant changes.
6. It may be that some of the assumptions of the past regarding what is necessary for a healthy functioning congregation may no longer be appropriate. If “necessity is the mother of invention”, there will be some congregations that explore and discover new ways to carry out their mission. Some of the assumptions that will need to be considered include prioritizing efforts that are directly related to mission, creating and housing income-producing programs and ministries, multi-congregational churches, bi-vocational or volunteer pastors, pastors with multiple charges, decreased staff dependency and increased lay leadership, online gatherings and ministry resources, and house church models.

**V Looking to the Future**

1. The challenges facing the Church prior to the coronavirus pandemic will continue to be of concern with aging pastors and laity, decreased attendance including youth and young adults, and decline in finances.
2. Some churches will weather the storm and come out the other side similar to the way they have experienced community and ministry prior to the pandemic.
3. For other churches, some of the adaptations they are making during the crisis may continue to be useful. For example, many of the online tools developed during the crisis may continue to be utilized in support of the worship, discipleship and outreach ministries of the Church.
4. For a third group of churches, the current crisis will likely bring issues of sustainability and even viability to a head. Some may not be able to sustain the financial challenges brought on by the pandemic and have no choice but to close. This may represent a loss of presence and ministry in some communities.
5. The closing of some churches may create an opportunity for districts to re-direct resources (especially assets from church properties) toward support for struggling churches, new church planting, and/or specialized staffing.
6. Most importantly, this may be a time when new expressions of ministry emerge. The numerical and financial declines prior to the pandemic combined with the challenges experienced during the pandemic may create an overall sense that old models of ministry are not sustainable or any longer appropriate in many contexts.
7. Leaders who are younger and/or innovative by nature will develop and be given authorization to implement new and creative ways to realign resources to mission. In the best-case scenarios, new forms of ministry will emerge that have greater relevance to the current culture while remaining faithful to our Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. This may look very different in comparison to the Church of the past.

**VI Summary Statement**

The Church was already faced with major challenges prior to COVID-19. Declines in average morning worship attendance, financial giving, and aging of the clergy combine to suggest that the current set of assumptions about the organizational and fiscal structure of many churches is not sustainable. Generational replacement is not promising as measures of participation for younger generational cohorts also appear to be in decline. Add to this the financial and social impacts of the pandemic. The current crisis presents a major opportunity for many churches to consider new and different ways to carry out their mission. Virus-related realities may have the effect of helping some churches consider their future sooner with all of its technological and missional resources than would otherwise have been the case. For some, the type of changes ahead may not be changes of degree, but changes of kind. While it will undoubtedly be painful for some, the prospects of not changing may be even much more painful in the long run. Innovative leaders at every level, denominational, regional, district and local, can help us think creatively in how to steward our resources in effective and efficient ways as we adjust our methods in order to be faithful to our mission.