

District Superintendent's Report

“The Power of People”

Dr. Graves, special guests, delegates, and friends, welcome to Greenbrier and the 59th Assembly of the North Arkansas District. Dozens of earthquakes rattled this town during the past few months. The truth is that there has been a “whole lotta shakin’ goin’ on” throughout the district during the 2010-11 church year. Like Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail, we’ve been “praying and singing hymns to God” (Acts 16:25). In fact, prayer has become a high priority and the results are undeniable: the foundations of our “prisons” have been shaken up, doors are flying open, chains are coming off, sinners are waking up, joy is replacing fear, and entire families are being transformed by the grace of God. I am eager to share with you the positive report of what the Lord has done *in and through* North Arkansas Nazarenes since our last family gathering.

It’s *our* report, not just mine. Therefore, I would like to recognize and thank those partners in ministry who have contributed to a banner year: auxiliary leaders – Nona Floyd (NMI), Tim Kellerman (SDMI), Kent Britton (NYI); district secretary – Ken Stallings; district treasurer – Susan Baker; District Advisory Board members – Charley Appleby, Curtis Clements, Bill Milburn, Dale Webster, Tim Bullington, Tim Kellerman, Jim Sanders, Larry Woodward; Missions USA Board Chairman – Alan Johnson; Board of Ministry Chairman – Tim Bullington; Finance Committee Chairman – Curtis Clements; Church Properties Board Chairman and Director of Adult Ministries – Ron Riddle; Director of Children’s Ministries – Kelly Bullington; those who have led camps, retreats, quizzing and other special events plus all those who have served on our committees and boards. And then, we should thank those not elected or appointed to any official position who serve behind the scenes, perhaps best represented by Brenda Sharp who uses her gift of hospitality to prepare breakfast for pastors meetings.

Both Nona Floyd (NMI President) and Kent Britton (NYI President) are stepping away from departmental leadership this year. They have been honored at their respective conventions and their successors elected. Even so, I want to publicly thank them again for their labors of love. Well done, good and faithful servants!

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins talks about the importance of “getting the right people on the bus” and having them sit in the right seat. Therein lies the success of any organization. There have been ten pastoral transitions during the 2010-11 church year, making a total of fifteen under my brief superintendency. Think of it. One-fourth of our churches have changed leaders within the past twenty months. Earlier you met the newest members of our ministry team; as you get to know them, you will understand why I am so optimistic about the future of the North Arkansas District. Our strong leadership team is getting even stronger. However, it’s not so much about me “getting the right people on the bus” as it is God working on both ends to connect pastors to churches. My enthusiasm about our newest pastors should not be interpreted as a lack of appreciation for those who have labored faithfully and fruitfully among us for years. They too are special. A pastor recently paid me a huge compliment by introducing me as his church’s “biggest fan” and went on to suggest that every pastor probably feels the same way. I hope so. I am indeed “fan”atical in my support of dedicated pastors and laypersons because the most important Kingdom work happens through the local church. As our ministry team stands, please join me in affirming them with a heartfelt round of applause. Laypersons, I want you to do one more thing: make sure that your church board gives attention to pastoral support by doing its best to follow the recommendations outlined in the Ministerial Support section of the Finance Committee report.

Pastors, you will receive a small gift from me at the conclusion of your 2 minute report today. Your delegate handbook contains a statistical summary for each church. As each pastor reports, rejoice in their victories and make notes of their concerns so that you will be able to pray for specific needs when you return home.

The Liberty Church has earned the General Superintendents Award – an honor reserved for those that excel in adding new Nazarenes, meeting all giving goals, and making a significant investment in new church sponsorship. In addition, I want to present a “Church of the Year” Eagle Award to Pastor Kevin Rector for his outstanding leadership in his first full year at Liberty. Their stellar record includes: 34% increase in church membership (including 9 new members by profession of faith), 20% increase in worship attendance, 11% increase in SDMI attendance, 31% increase in the

amount of money raised for all purposes. More importantly, Pastor Kevin has led the congregation in the Bible experiment – a plan that challenges church members to read through the Bible in one year and includes sermons based upon that week’s assigned Scriptures. Sounds like Pastor Kevin is serious about making Christlike disciples. It gives me great joy to present this award to him.

In addition, I want to commend the following for outstanding leadership beyond the categories by which we usually measure growth: Alan Johnson (Rogers First) for collaboration with Rogers New Hope and Berryville; Mark Sanford (Van Buren First) for tornado relief efforts in Joplin, MO; Tim Kellerman for cultivating a passion for prayer among us.

Three of our pastors have provided exemplary leadership in their churches since the mid 80s – Larry Woodward (28 yrs), Jim Sanders (27 yrs), and Ken Stallings (24 yrs). We honored Jim, the oldest of the “three amigos,” during last night’s retirement ceremony. It would be impossible to overstate his value to all of us. Across the years, Jim served in key leadership roles on the district, mentored younger pastors, encouraged his superintendents, and blessed everyone with his gracious spirit. Now, it’s goodbye tension, hello pension! Not so fast. You’ll be pleased to know that the Advisory Board warmly embraced my proposal to have Jim maintain some tension in his life by serving as the assistant DS. The details of the job description are sketchy at this point, but you can expect to see Jim representing me from time to time if the assignment doesn’t interfere too much with his fishing, hunting, and “honey do” list.

Last year, I suggested that the story of God’s work among us is an ongoing narrative; you might think of it as a movie with no ending. And yet, we need to study a still picture to evaluate the health of our district from time to time. Here’s the 2010-2011 “family snapshot”:

Average Weekly Sunday School/Discipleship Attendance	3,598 (+296)
Sunday School/Discipleship Enrollment (Responsibility list)	7,570 (-168)
Average Weekly Corporate Worship Attendance	4,039 (-6)
Church Membership	6,306 (+46)
New Nazarenes	197

Conversions	297
Baptisms	139
Total Raised for All Purposes	\$7,202,303 (- \$407,722)

Numbers can be numbing. Even so, my reports typically contain lots of data, probably TMI (too much information), derived from a closer look inside the numbers. I will attempt to be succinct.

Sunday School/Discipleship Ministries: 32 of our churches reported gains over last year; 18 showed losses; 8 remained the same. The following earned Sunday School Growth Awards: Fort Smith Southside (Exceptional), Altus (Superior), Bethel (Superior), Fort Smith First (Superior), Fort Smith Trinity (Superior), Liberty (Superior), Marion Cypress Creek (Superior), Morrilton (Superior), Osceola (Superior), Ozark (Superior), Pea Ridge (Superior), Rogers Primera (Superior), Springdale Primera (Superior), Beebe First (Honor), Bridgeway Community (Honor), Cabot Russell Chapel (Honor), Hickory Plains (Honor), Rogers First (Honor), Sherwood First (Honor). If our mission really is to make Christlike disciples, we must get our folks back into the Book via Sunday School and various venues throughout the week.

Corporate Worship Attendance: 27 churches reported increases; 21 declined; 10 remained the same. Rogers First (+32), Fort Smith First (+28), Fort Smith Trinity (+20), Altus (+13), Liberty (+12), Searcy (+11), Van Buren (+11), and Springdale Primera (+10) all had double-digit gains. In some places, worship has become a spectator sport. Not around here. Throughout the district, Debbie and I have found folks – young and old alike – actively engaging in passionate worship and experiencing the glorious presence of the Lord. The musical styles range from Wesley to Gaither to Tomlin. And yet, it's all about Jesus!

Church Membership/Conversions: 20 churches reported net gains in membership; 21 experienced net losses; 17 remained the same. Of the 197 new Nazarenes, 140 were received by profession of faith. Without a doubt, here's the most troubling discovery of all: 29 churches, almost half of our congregations, did not receive one new member by profession of faith. What happened to the evangelistic passion that characterized Nazarenes throughout the 20th century? Just saying...

The record suggests that almost all of our churches have adjusted well to the new Funding the Mission system. Like almost everything else, it has its pros and cons. On the upside, it leaves more money for missional ministries in your community. On the downside, it makes it difficult to establish a budget – since income can fluctuate from year to year or even within the same year. The same is true on the district level. As the Finance Committee prepared the 2010-11 budget, they “guesstimated” district fund receipts and proposed lean spending. I am pleased to tell you that District Fund giving actually increased substantially over last year. We could have easily allowed financial fears to limit our support of global evangelism, Nazarene higher education, retired ministers, and district ministries. Not so. Instead, we did what we have always done – we gave sacrificially, demonstrating a missional mentality and our ongoing denominational loyalty. We are unapologetically Nazarene and are steadfast in the support of our connectional interests, as the following totals suggest:

	Proposed Amount	Actually Given
World Evangelism Fund		\$566,104 (5.75%)
Pensions and Benefits Fund	\$132,676	\$132,676 (2.0%)
SNU Educational Fund	\$165,845	\$154,085 (2.32%)
District Unified Fund	\$398,028	\$383,722 (5.74%)

Which fund is the most important? Local church leaders often ask that question when trying to prioritize their giving. It’s a tough one. While there is more romance associated with the World Evangelism Fund than the others, I consider them equally important to the broader work of the Kingdom and hope that sentiment will be reflected in our balanced effort to fund the church’s mission.

Since the amount raised by a local church is a moving target and contributions are not always posted immediately, it becomes more difficult to determine who has reached the proposed giving level: WEF – 5.5%; P&B – 2%; SNU – 2.5%; District – 6%. According to pastors’ reports, the following 32 churches have met or exceeded these goals: Altus, Beebe First, Bentonville, Bridgeway Community, Conway First, Conway Harvest, Farmington, Fayetteville, Fort Smith First, Fort Smith Trinity, Greenbrier, Harrison, Heber Springs, Jonesboro Forest Home, Liberty, Maple Shade,

McCrary, Mountain Home Twin Lakes, Paragould First, Paragould Woodland Hills, Pickens Chapel, Pleasant Hill, Rogers First, Rogers New Hope, Rogers Primera, Searcy, Sherwood First, Siloam Springs, Springdale First, Van Buren First, Vilonia, White River.

You've heard the statistical summary. It's important, but I am coming to believe that numbers tell us more about the district's size than its health – unless we focus on the *right* numbers.

Back in 1950s, newborn babies faced great danger: one in thirty still died at birth – odds that were just slightly better than they were a century before – and it wasn't clear how the odds could be improved. An anesthesiologist named Virginia Apgar was disturbed by the fact that babies who were malformed or too small or just blue and not breathing well were listed as stillborn, placed out of sight, and left to die. She believed that these newborns could be saved and devised a scoring system that gave nurses a way to rate the health of babies in five categories: appearance (skin color), pulse (heart rate), grimace (reflex irritability), activity (muscle tone), and respiration. A baby can score either 0, 1, or 2 in each area; 10 points means the child was born in perfect condition; 7-10 is considered normal; 4 points or less means a blue baby needing immediate attention. You get the idea.

This simple score radically changed the way medical professionals evaluate a baby's health. Competitive doctors who wanted to boost Apgar scores for their newborns began giving babies oxygen or warming them. Spinals and epidurals replaced general anesthesia. They began using prenatal ultrasounds and fetal heart monitors. Today, instead of one in every 30 babies dying at birth, it's one in every 500.

In a recent *Leadership Journal* article, Kevin Miller suggested that we need an Apgar score for the church – a new way of evaluating congregational health that moves us beyond counting “nickles and noses.” I agree. Attendance and financial stats are okay, but they are insufficient and sometimes misleading. Miller proposed an Apgar score based on Acts 2:42-47, Luke's snapshot of the healthy, bouncing baby church in Jerusalem. Five characteristics emerge from this descriptive and prescriptive passage.

1. Apostolic teaching and worship. *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* (Acts 2:42)
2. Power. *“Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.”* (Acts 2:43)
3. Generosity. *“The believers had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”* (Acts 2:44-45).
4. Association. *“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”* (Acts 2:46)
5. Reproduction. *“...enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”* (Acts 2:47)

I have given the North Arkansas District a composite score of 6, using the Apgar model (apostolic teaching/worship – 1; power – 1; generosity – 2; association – 1; reproduction – 1). Obviously, a district is only as healthy as the churches within its boundaries.

My hope is that all North Arkansas Nazarene leaders will engage in ongoing evaluation of their local church throughout this church year. Here’s the template for establishing the Apgar score. (Show slide) It’s a quick and easy process that takes about five minutes. If you stop there, your math skills may improve but church health will not. Take it a step further by addressing the maladies with earnest prayer and strategic planning. Frankly, the window of opportunity is closing on a few of our churches. If bold and courageous steps are not taken, some of these “blue babies” will die soon.

Construction on our new district resource center is now complete, and the dedication is scheduled to be held at the conclusion of today’s Assembly business. This 2,527 sq. ft. facility, located at 1150 E. German Lane in Conway, contains two offices, the secretary/receptionist area, a workroom for office equipment, a break room, storage area and a conference room for pastors training sessions and district board meetings. The building has curb appeal, but I am most excited about its functionality. It is wired for state of the art technology that should enable us to conduct business via video conferences, Skype interviews, and webinars while saving time and travel costs. Our goal is to transform the “district office” into a true “resource center.” Special thanks are due Bill Milburn, Jim

Sanders, Tim Kellerman, and Debbie Berkner for handling countless details during the construction process.

Moving always provides an opportunity to discard things that have outlived their usefulness. During the office transition, I nearly tossed an old clock marked by the letters SNC because I was thinking “Southern Nazarene College” before it became a university. Duh. Suddenly it dawned on me that SNU was never named SNC. Upon closer examination, I noticed that SNC stood for “Start New Churches!” The clock became, in that instant, a powerful and instructive image. I kept the clock for display in the new office because it’s a constant reminder that church planting is in our DNA. Now is the time to redouble our efforts because several congregations seem near the end of their organizational life cycle and new churches tend to be more effective than established ones in reaching the unchurched. I am pleased to report the successful launch of Living Water Church in Jonesboro on 10-10-10. Pastor James Betts and this small, but vibrant, group have rented and remodeled a nice storefront facility that will accommodate their anticipated growth. I commend the visionary leaders of the mother church (Jonesboro Forest Home) who gave away members and money for this newstart effort. May their tribe increase. Maumelle is the likely location of our next church planting adventure, but we remain willing to walk through any of God’s open doors.

Ordinary folks passionately united around a noble purpose can achieve extraordinary results. I call it “the power of people.” It has been on public display in various venues throughout the world in recent days.

Consider the so-called Arab Spring. The Arab world, long known for political stagnation under ruthless dictators, is witnessing a rapid transformation sparked by the bravery of those who have been beaten, tear-gassed, and shot. The suppressed who have lived in quiet desperation are rising up to say, “Enough is enough!” Connected by social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), common folks are demanding democratic reform in places like Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Jordan, and Syria. Their swelling numbers have rulers rethinking the rule of law, social justice, and human rights. Why? It’s the power of people.

You see it in the Tea Party, a grass-roots movement of conservatives who want to reduce government spending, the budget deficit, and taxes. Apparently, their “Taxed Enough Already” message resonated with voters in the 2010 elections. Many “newbies” with limited name recognition and financial resources replaced well-known and well-funded career politicians. How? Once again, it’s the power of people. You need not identify with the Tea Party views to acknowledge that it is a force to be reckoned with because ordinary folks have passionately united around a common cause.

Closer to home, we’ve witnessed the power of people working together in the aftermath of devastating tornadoes and floods. Energized volunteers have handled the lion’s share of the massive clean-up effort in Vilonia and other affected areas.

During the 2010-11 church year, North Arkansas Nazarenes have united around a noble purpose – making Christlike disciples at home and abroad. Here’s a sampling of our efforts:

- ▶ Pastor Fabian Correa and members of Springdale Primera traveled all the way to Paragould on several occasions to strengthen and encourage our fledgling Hispanic group. They also conducted evangelistic revival services in Batesville with an eye toward starting our Hispanic ministry there. Despite cold weather during the outdoor meeting, more than 20 individuals accepted Jesus Christ as Savior. Gloria a Dios!
- ▶ Pastor Steve Hall led a 12-member work and witness team for a construction project and evangelism in St. Lucia.
- ▶ Pastor Clint Jones and members of our Cypress Creek Church took a huge step of faith by building a new sanctuary, in hopes of reaching Marion for Christ.
- ▶ Pastor Tim Kellerman initiated a pastors prayer breakfast and partnered with the district in sponsoring the recent Prayer Conference at Conway First Church.
- ▶ Several churches used the *Grace Card* movie as an outreach/evangelistic event.
- ▶ Three churches – Rogers First, Fort Smith First, and Conway First – reported powerful revivals with evangelist Dan Bohi in which many testified to freedom from addictions, heart cleansing, and healing.
- ▶ Pastor Sonny and Brandy Morgason are reached out to scores of children and teens in the Altus/Ozark area.

- ▶ Pastor Paul and Jacki Hazelton organized and conducted a “caravan revival” among senior adults throughout the district.
- ▶ Pastor Mark Fryar partnered with Rogers First to launch “New Hope Café,” a Saturday evening coffee house ministry geared for unchurched young adults.
- ▶ Pastor Jeff Taylor and the Sherwood Church presented a drive-through “Life of Christ” pageant during the Advent Season.

Fosdick said, “Democracy is based upon the conviction that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people.” I believe that Christ builds His Church with that same conviction. The power of people. Ordinary folks passionately united around a noble purpose achieve extraordinary results. In some cases, we have not seen extraordinary results – yet. I am convinced, however, that we will because *our* work is *His* work and *our* power is *His* power – the same power that raised Jesus from the dead . “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9).

The key is passion. A ho-hum, been there-done that, approach to our purpose changes nothing. Revolutions are not begun by protestors who gather in the public square because they didn’t have anything better to do between 3-5 pm on Thursdays. Tornado-ravaged towns are not rebuilt by the lazy and apathetic. Neither is the Kingdom of God. Let’s not settle for being casual Christians. Purpose + Passion = Positive Results. There’s no limit to what God can do through people of passion and purpose – ordinary folks who have joined the fellowship of the unashamed. (Show video: “The Fellowship of the Unashamed”)

North Arkansas Nazarenes, people all around us are hopeless and helpless to save themselves. We have what they need. For too long, many of us have remained in our holy huddles planning programs that we hope will attract them to our churches. Guess what? They are not coming – at least in numbers that they once were. This generation is tired of the hype of events and is eager to give their lives to something that requires sacrifice. They want to get their hands in the dirt of humanity and see real change in the communities where they live. They will come to the church building for some of the attractional events but will get disillusioned quickly if these events do not

result in real opportunities to serve their world. The “y’all come approach no longer works. Let’s face it...we’ve become far too comfortable enjoying God’s glory while ignoring His mission. It can no longer be “business as usual.” The stakes are too high. Have you become lukewarm and lax? Is your passion waning? Are you in need of a fresh outpouring of God’s Spirit?

From 1878 to 1969, on summer evenings, visitors at Yosemite National Park’s Camp Curry waited in anxious silence. At exactly 9 p.m. a ranger would stand at Camp Curry below and shout to the man at Glacier Point above: “Let the Fire Fall!” Then, the man tending the fire at Glacier Point would cry out: “The Fire is Falling.” Folks still recall what happened next as an emotional and spiritual experience. Workers thousands of feet above the camp forced a great bonfire of red fir bark evenly over the edge of the cliff, appearing to the onlookers below as a glowing waterfall of sparks and fire.

Let’s join our voices together and cry out to God: “Let the Fire Fall!” May the Holy Spirit wake us, shake us, and make us into His passionate people of purpose and power. May our churches become “centers of holy fire.”

In conclusion, I want to report up-to-date victory through Christ Jesus. He is my Savior, Sanctifier, and Sustainer. My desire is to embody all that we preach and teach in the holiness tradition. Now that Debbie and I have made it around to every church, we have an even deeper appreciation for the privilege of leading this district. We love you dearly and take very seriously the sacred trust you have placed in us.

Respectfully submitted,

D. Randy Berkner