

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Exploring Nazarene
History and Polity



SESSION 11

Denominational Obligations:
District and General Church

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Denominational Obligations: District and General Church

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LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand the function of the district and district superintendent, and the local pastor's responsibilities to both
- understand the international partnership of the church
- understand how the church functions at the general level
- trace the values that have given identity to the Church of the Nazarene
- understand the process of bringing people into membership and be able to do that
- understand and articulate the rationale for having a specific organization to promote the message of holiness

Denominational Obligations: District and General Church

INTRODUCTION



In order to further the work of the gospel, the Church of the Nazarene forms itself into districts that provide a system of oversight for the local church. At the district level, the ministerial relations are handled through licensing and ordination. The districts also provide a number of activities for the local church member. This session explores the denominational obligations of members of the Church of the Nazarene. There is a discussion of the district level church. The session describes such entities as the General Assembly, the General Board, and the office of the general superintendent, and the general church where Nazarenes from all over the world share and discuss their vision of Christianity.

THE DISTRICT AS A BASIC UNIT



NOTES

The basic unit of government in the Church of the Nazarene is the district. While the district structure has been around for the history of the Church of the Nazarene, only in the 1970s was there an attempt to make these districts uniform across the world. The way in which a district has been formed reflects the goal of the church to reach globalization.

The changes involved in the district status began with the Miami General Assembly in 1972, when the proposal was accepted to begin the process of internationalization. The initial recommendation stated that mission area districts must be represented on all legislative bodies of the church. They also developed a district system that moved districts throughout the world to independence and self-governance. The Guatemala NE District became the first regular district outside traditional areas. Later general assemblies divided the work of the Church of the Nazarene into regions.

In 2002, the district alignment was based upon the nomenclature of Phase 1, 2, and 3. The division into different levels of membership is an attempt to foster self-government. (*Manual*, paragraph 200.2)

Phase 1 districts are created when the church moves into a new area. The regional director, Global Mission director and general superintendent(s) in jurisdiction play a major role in the development of the new area.

Phase 2 occurs when there are a minimum of 10 organized churches, 500 full members, 5 ordained ministers, and a minimum of 50 percent of district administrative funds must be raised by the district. The basic principles are members, self-governance, and financial viability.

Phase 3 districts are fully self-supporting in regards to district administration. The minimum criteria would be 20 organized churches, 1,000 full members, and 10 ordained ministers. The purpose of the levels of districts was and is to nurture growth and create a situation where districts have the same rights and privileges throughout the world.

DISTRICT STRUCTURES



NOTES

The district superintendent has been an important fixture in the Church of the Nazarene since its beginning. One reason for the formation of the church in 1907 was to facilitate organized holiness. The belief was oversight was needed to accomplish tasks that went beyond the ability of local churches. An organization too loose in the form of associations did not lead to the growth and development envisioned. The district superintendent (DS) has been an important office for church growth and pastoral care for pastors.

The district superintendent is appointed for the lower level districts but is elected by Phase 3 and sometimes in Phase 2 situations. The district superintendent monitors the health of local congregations and the condition of pastors. The DS is to intervene if a crisis develops with the local church or the pastor. The DS is also in charge of the review process of the pastors. The superintendent has general oversight of the business and spiritual activities of the district. The shared nature of power in the Church of the Nazarene is found in that all official acts of the district superintendent can be reviewed and revised by the district assembly. (*Manual*, paragraphs 205.2)

Five additional entities on the district are the district secretary, district treasurer, the District Advisory Board, the Ministerial Credentials Board, the District Ministerial Credentials Board and District Ministerial Studies Board. The district secretary functions in a similar capacity to the secretary of the local board. The secretary takes care of all the statistical records of the district. The district treasurer handles the finances of the district by receiving the funds and keeping the records. The District Advisory Board is comprised of both lay and clergy and functions similar to a church board on the district level. (*Manual*, paragraphs 219 - 221, 222 - 23.2, 224 - 228, 229 - 229 - 23.10 and 232 - 234.4)

The Ministerial Credentials Board and the District Ministerial Studies Board are involved in the licensing and ordination process. All candidates for district license must report and interview with these boards. The Ministerial Studies Board also monitors the education progress of the candidates. The Credentials Board has the broadest level of responsibility and makes certain candidates are acceptable in terms of their religious experience, doctrine, and lifestyle. The Credentials Board may also be involved in investigating why a minister has not reported to the district.

 **NOTES**

The district assembly conducts the business of the district. Delegates are elected at the local church level. At the district assembly, the group votes on the election or reelection of the district superintendent. The assembly also gives final approval to those seeking a ministerial license and elects those qualified to the order of elder or deacon. It also elects the board mentioned in the previous paragraph. The district assembly also elects the delegates to the General Assembly. (*Manual*, paragraphs 226 and 229)

The district assembly is a time for worship services. Normally in these worship services the general superintendent will be the speaker. One of the services will be an ordination service.

PASTORS' REPORTS AND DISTRICT LIFE



NOTES

One of the more significant roles of the district assembly has been to receive the reports of the churches and the pastors. Besides written reports, the pastor often is asked to provide an oral report or testimony. The district superintendent also gives a report of the district.

The report of the pastor is part of the accountability called for within the church. It also can be a time of sharing and support. As a matter of public record, the statistics of the church will be reported either in an oral or written format.

Personal highlights or problems during the past year can be shared. A pastor might also give his or her testimony or the share the vision of their local church. District life is spotlighted during the district assembly as clergy and laypeople come together for business and worship during one or two days. The district attempts to draw together the district family through other activities during the year including youth camps, laymen and pastor and spouse retreats, Bible quizzing, holiday celebrations, and Work and Witness trips. Local churches vary in their support and participation in these events. Through these various events, the district superintendent and the district can provide pastoral care. The responsibility of a pastor would be to get involved in these activities and encourage such involvement within his or her church and staff.

Regarding the giving of the local church funds the district activities, the budgeting system was created to support the district functions and becomes part of the organized holiness commitment. (*Manual*, paragraph 205.21)

GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND CAUCUS



NOTES

The highest legislative body of the Church of the Nazarene is the general assembly. This meeting, comprised of elected delegates from throughout the world, meets every four years. Certain individuals become delegates because of their office within the general church, but most of the delegates come as part of a district delegation. The size of the delegation is apportioned according to the membership of the district and is equally divided between lay and clergy. (*Manual*, paragraphs 301 - 302)

The assembly debates and votes on the resolutions or memorials sent from the districts or some general church division, such as the general superintendents or the General Board. The legislation first goes to a committee that works on the legislation and adopts, rejects, or amends it. The report of the committee action is sent to the entire assembly, which can then respond to the report in the same manner. Most of the items under consideration involve church polity and result in changes in the *Manual*. Any constitutional change must be ratified by a vote of at least two-thirds of all Phase 2 and Phase 3 districts.

The assembly also considers larger issues of the direction of the church. This can be seen in the commissions that have studied issues during the last 30 years. One topic of consideration has been the process of globalization of the church. Examined from various angles, the church has attempted to provide equal representation to those Nazarenes who live outside of North America and Europe. Since the late 1990s, the church in the regions outside of the US/Canada has surpassed the US/Canada in total membership. Another issue has been the question of how budgets should be divided. The United States delegates have been particularly involved in discussing the percentages local churches pay for their educational, district, and general budgets. (*Manual*, paragraphs 32 and 335.6 - 335.10)

One additional feature of the Assembly has been the regional caucus. In an attempt to address issues that primarily impact one regional area, small meetings of the region are held at the Assembly. These meetings also elect the representatives to various general church entities. (*Manual*, paragraph 305 - 305.8)

GENERAL BOARD AND OFFICERS



NOTES

In the 1920s, in an effort to consolidate the work of the church, the General Board was created. At the same time, the budgeting system of General Budget was introduced.

Election to the General Board is based upon a representation-apportioned formula determined to provide equal representation of world members as well as lay and clergy. The board is to meet at least three times during the four years between general assemblies. It provides oversight to the Church of the Nazarene between the assemblies. The General Board also has the power to fill a vacancy in the office of general superintendents. (*Manual*, paragraphs 316, 305.2 and 335.2)

Two important officers of the General Board would be the general secretary and general treasurer. The general secretary maintains the records of the general church, including the proceedings of the general assembly and the General Board. This office also preserves the statistics of the church. The office oversees the planning and running of the general assembly. The general treasurer monitors the funds that belong to the general church, especially the funds raised through the World Evangelism Fund. (*Manual*, paragraphs 324 and 328)

The highest level of authority in a single office in the Church of the Nazarene is the general superintendent. These officers are elected and reelected by the general assembly for a four-year term. They must be reelected through a "Yes" and "No" ballot to continue their service to the church. The election process begins with the assembly delegates writing in for nomination any ordained elder of the church who is at least 35 years of age. Election occurs when two-thirds of the ballots are marked for one candidate.

The general superintendents provide visible unity in the church. They travel throughout the world convening the district assemblies. They also conduct the ordination ceremony and give final approval for everyone to be ordained. (*Manual*, paragraph 305.3 and 306 - 307.16)

THE INTERNATIONAL CHURCH



NOTES

Since the 1970s, the Church of the Nazarene has been attempting to make the global church one, in more than name, in the sharing of power. This can be seen most clearly in the creation of a district structure that leads to equal representation in the general assembly, based upon minimum standards of membership and self-government.

The World Mission Division plays a major role in this globalization process. From the beginning, the churches that comprised the Church of the Nazarene had a vision for missions. The story of missions begins with work in India and Guatemala at the turn of the century. The work in Guatemala has developed to such an extent that Guatemala had the first regular or Phase 3 district outside of the North American and European areas.

Initially, the work of missions involved the USA sending large numbers of missionaries to do the actual work of evangelism. The mission focus also involved compassionate ministries through medical care and education. The shift in missions began in the 1960s and 1970s, with the intentional move to encourage the development of indigenous leadership. This could be seen with the change in the nature of the districts. One example of this change might be the holding of the first truly global theology conference outside the United States in 2002 in Guatemala with dual translation of English and Spanish.

Two other organizations, Nazarene Youth International and the Nazarene Missions International, are involved in various phases of missions. NYI fosters youth activities at the district and general level. NMI is largely involved in mission education through publication of materials and facilitation of Work and Witness trips throughout the world.

One of the issues that has tied the church together has been what is called today the World Evangelism Fund (General Budget). Support for the missionary and global activities of the church has come through funding at the local church level. This issue of funding raises the point of what it means to be a member of a denomination. (*Manual*, paragraphs 335.6 - 335.10)

Participation in the General Budget has been a sign of working together to achieve the mission of proclaiming the gospel of holiness and entire sanctification throughout the world. Together we work to provide the means of evangelism throughout the world.

 **NOTES**

The international church has been divided into various regions. These regions emerged out of the reform in district and mission structure in the 1970s. The 2001 Assembly seemed to stress this regional concept. Yet, the church has thus far maintained the concept of one general assembly and the philosophy of “one church, one doctrine, one polity, and one policy.” (*Manual*, paragraphs 22.1, 200.2 and 346 - 346.7)

RATIONAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONCERNS



NOTES

So why is the general church needed and what can be done at the general level that cannot be achieved as well at the local level? Education is one issue that seems to require a general church. Nazarenes have made education a high priority, with our system of university education in the United States, Great Britain, Europe, the Philippines, Korea, and Africa. Also included in this push for education are numerous seminaries, Bible schools, and other delivery systems that prepare pastors for ministry. (*Manual*, paragraphs 400 - 403)

Another concern is the production of literature. The publishing house has always played a prominent role in the church, with its mission to publish and its financial support of the church. Certainly, the global missionary endeavor has had more success being directed at a general level than from the various local churches. The question comes as to whether Nazarenes are still committed to education, publication of literature, and a global proclamation of holiness. (*Manual*, paragraphs 338 - 339)

What provides the unity to this global mission? The church was formed to proclaim entire sanctification. The emphasis was upon “organized” holiness to achieve this end. Does the mission to proclaim the message of holiness provide unity throughout the church? A general church can spend its money on doing many good activities. The question is whether Nazarenes are still joined together on this issue. Part of the task of the debate is how to translate holiness into the various cultures of the world. (See *Manual*, Forward)

Perhaps as important to proclaiming the message of holiness throughout the world is the ability to have conversation with people from various cultures concerning the nature of holiness. Maybe a general church is needed as a forum for Christians from various cultures to talk with each other about the true meaning of entire sanctification and holiness.

The general church is needed because not only is our mission to proclaim holiness to the entire world, but that through the endeavor the church can renew its understanding of the meaning of holiness and entire sanctification.

The Church of the Nazarene is an international body of believers. The general level of the church may be the ultimate outcome of believing in organized holiness. Through the General Assembly, General Board, and the office of general superintendents, dialogue takes place over what is truly the meaning of holiness.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Read *Manual* paragraphs:

- 31 - 35
- 200 - 200.2
- 201 - 207.6
- 208 - 218.1
- 219 - 221
- 222 - 223.2
- 224 - 228
- 229 - 231.10
- 232 - 234.4
- 235 - 235.1
- 300 - 300.2
- 236 - 237.5
- 238 - 238.3
- 239
- 241 - 242.3
- 300 - 304.2
- 305 - 305.8
- 306 - 307.16
- 315 - 336

See: http://whdl.org/sites/default/files/resource/book/EN_manual_2013-17.pdf

2. Write a rationale for supporting the mission of the general Church of the Nazarene. Offer any suggestions for changing the structure of the general church.
3. Reflect on the importance of the support the district provides to pastors. How do you see yourself getting involved with the district functions?

See: http://whdl.org/sites/default/files/resource/other/EN_created_for_mission.pdf

EXAM



NOTES

1. The first regular district outside the United States was in _____.
 - A. Peru
 - B. Guatemala
 - C. Costa Rica
 - D. Mexico
2. Phase 1 districts are created when the church moves into a new area.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. Phase 2 districts occur when there are a minimum of 10 organized churches, 500 full members, and 5 ordained elders, and 50% of the district administration funds have been raised.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. Phase 3 districts must be fully self-supporting in regards to district administration.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. The _____ has been an important office for church growth and pastoral care for pastors.
 - A. district secretary
 - B. district superintendent
 - C. general superintendent
 - D. chairman of the Board of Trustees
6. The annual pastoral report serves as a point of accountability and includes _____.
 - A. written reports
 - B. oral report or testimony
 - C. statistics of the church
 - D. all of the above
7. The highest legislative body of the Church of the Nazarene is the
 - A. the local church
 - B. the district assembly
 - C. the general assembly
 - D. the church board

 **NOTES**

8. Features of the General Assembly include all EXCEPT _____.
 - A. elected delegates from throughout the world
 - B. delegation is apportioned according to the membership of the district and is equally divided between lay and clergy
 - C. debates and votes on the resolutions
 - D. meets every two years

9. The General Board was created _____.
 - A. to consolidate the work of the church
 - B. to provide oversight to the Church of the Nazarene between the assemblies
 - C. to make constitutional change
 - D. to appoint general superintendents
 - E. A, B

10. Initially, the work of missions involved the USA sending large numbers of missionaries to do the actual work of evangelism.
 - A. True
 - B. False

11. Support for the missionary and global activities of the church has come through _____.
 - A. district love offerings
 - B. two annual mission offerings
 - C. funding at the local church level
 - D. funds raised at General Assembly

12. Participation in the General Budget _____.
 - A. is a sign of working together to achieve the mission of proclaiming the gospel of holiness and entire sanctification throughout the world
 - B. provides the means of evangelism throughout the world
 - C. is evidence of what it means to be a member of a denomination
 - D. all of the above

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. What part of the story of Nazarene history do you believe most provides a rationale for what and who the Nazarenes have been in the past and are becoming today?
2. What is the most important reason for and process of how a person becomes a member in the Church of the Nazarene?
3. How does the church organize to achieve its mission of holiness? What is the importance of organized holiness?
4. What do you understand to be the purpose or how each of the general entities function? What do you see as a reason for this general level of the church?
5. What do you feel brings unity to the Church of the Nazarene?
6. Reflect on what it means for the Church of the Nazarene to be international.
7. What do you see as the purpose of a district? What is the benefit of having district assemblies meet on an annual basis? What are some suggestions for how to generate lay interest in the activities of the district assembly?
8. What is the significance for church members to participate in district activities?