

District Superintendent's Report to the District Assembly 2024

Greetings and Welcome

General Superintendent Dr Filimao Chambo, brothers and sisters of the Metro New York District, Church of the Nazarene, Grace and Peace! I welcome with us today our Jurisdictional General Superintendent Dr Chambo and his wife Dr Samantha Chambo, the Regional Educational Coordinator for the US & Canada Region of the Church of the Nazarene. We also welcome Dr Stan Reeder, the Regional Director for US & Canada Church of the Nazarene. I welcome very specially my colleague District Superintendents who have supported me through out my time in this role with their friendship, fellowship and counsel and are present here today.

There are many other distinguished guests here and I welcome you all and look forward to hearing from those of you who will be invited to speak to us in your various capacities, as we partner together for the sake of the kingdom of Christ.

Acknowledgements

It is my privilege to be giving this my sixth and final report as District Superintendent of the Metro New York District. It was an unequalled honor to be asked to serve God and you His people,

sisters and brothers, in this role for these 6 years. I acknowledge with deep appreciation and gratitude the partnership and guidance of the General Church through the General Superintendents that have been in jurisdiction over this time. Individually, they have encouraged me, expressed confidence in me, counseled and prayed for and with me. Collectively, they have been sterling examples of transformational Christian leadership. Thank you Rev Dr David Busic, Rev Dr Carla Sunberg, Rev Dr Gustavo Crocker and Rev Dr Filimao Chambo. At the outset I want to also acknowledge with a sense of deep indebtedness the staff team that God has graciously provided for me over these years to carry out with me the responsibility of the superintendency. I could not do it without you, one and all you pulled your weight and more - great will be your reward in heaven. I do not have words to thank those others of you who have sacrificially volunteered your time and expertise to serve on our District boards and committees - abundant Blessings are in store for you. May God satisfy you and your families with grace upon grace for all your needs "according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus".

And how can I say thanks to God's army of pastors and credentialed ministers on this my MNY District, I call you soldiers today because you were in the forefront of a war in these years

as together we battled the onslaught of Principalities and Powers that threatened to tear the local church apart by the convergence of three Church killing diabolical strategies. But we are still here - the Churches of the Metro New York District Church of the Nazarene are alive and “open for business” - doing our part in carrying out the mission of the Church of the Nazarene - “Making Christlike Disciples in the Nations” in this unique microcosm of “the nations”. Firstly, you my sisters and brothers were nimble, creative and resolute and so kept your local church marching on through this epicenter of the deadly global Covid 19 pandemic and its game changing aftermath. Secondly, you have bravely and courageously maintained the integrity of the Biblical message we preach during these years of unprecedented ethical and political tribalism in America. You made it clear that the Church of Jesus Christ as represented by the Metro New York District Church of the Nazarene is not a political pawn to be coopted by any partisan political or social agenda. Solders of the cross, you unapologetically proclaimed our message of Holiness with resolute focus - seeking to make “Christlike disciples in the Nations”. Thirdly, over these tumultuous years you, dear colleagues, helped your congregations, especially the young people in them, negotiate the rough waters of racial unrest in our country at a time when there was a renewed national revolt against what some experienced as systemic racial injustice.

Thank you for holding the light in an extremely challenging and dark time. Thank you and thank God for you my fellow ministers of the Gospel.

In July of this year, God's willing, I would have been married to Angela for 44 years. God has been so good to me and has blessed me in giving me my wife Angie in a way far more than I deserved but graciously with exactly what I needed. The Jamaican reggae singer Taurus Riley must have read my mind when he wrote his signature song "She's Royal" because frankly, he is reflecting my sentiments exactly and seems to be really singing about Angie. She is a wonderful wife but more than that she is also my spiritual vicar, my private moral compass and personal pastoral coach. Thank you Honey. Thanks to my adult children and their spouses - David and Deidre, Kara-Beth and Greg for your loving support, your Christian commitment reflected in your very valuable service to Church and society. You make me proud. Most of all thank you for the six beautiful grand children with which you have lighted up the lives of Angie and I.

Introduction

This District Assembly is a momentous one in which there will be the election of a new District Superintendent and consequently we here will transition to a new administration. We have prayed

earnestly over this year in this regard and so I am confident that our prayer answering God will unfold an exciting future for our District. The best is yet to come! Accordingly, our theme is “Embracing God’s Future Overflowing with Hope”

We are convinced that at this time of transition it is the right time to focus our thoughts on: 1. A Reiteration of the Vision of Hope for this District 2. A Recognition of the Concrete Gains of the Past that God has caused to be established in our District - the foundations laid that have provided for us a solid basis on which to build 3. A Reflection on the Faithful Promises of a Promise Keeping God on which we can securely rely for a bright future 4. A Reaffirmation of God’s Principled Requirements which are inextricably related to the Promises of God and 5. A Realization of the Priority and Necessity of intentional strategic Preparation for God’s Preferred Future to become a reality for us.

Scripture gives us the account of the paradigmatic leadership transition for the pilgrim people of God in ancient Israel in going from the leadership of their first leader Moses to his successor Joshua. That biblical account provides for us a useful template to direct our thoughts in our own time of transition today and I am going to use it as such. Let me start with the reading of the Biblical account.

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:1-9 NIV

Reiterating the Vision of Hope for the MNY District

The over arching vision of hope placed before ancient Israel in our passage was God's promise of a land for their very own - the "Promised Land"

... – to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses...

What then is the overarching vision of hope for the Metro New York District Church of the Nazarene? What, so to speak is our "Promised Land"?

We reiterate that it is the exemplifying of and incarnating of the Biblical vision of God's holy people. Being God's representative community characterized by His Holy Spirit produced love and unity. A love and unity displayed among people who are ethnically, culturally, economically, educationally and other wise diverse. A love and unity that heralds to our xenophobic, politically polarized, identity politics ravaged, moral values confused context, the redemptive message that Jesus of Nazareth, was indeed sent from God the Father Almighty as the Savior of the whole world. He is in fact God in human flesh. His incarnation enabled His sacrificial death in the service of reconciling all people to God and all people to one another. He brings a salvation that makes peace between God and humanity and between human beings and other human beings

The Apostle Paul addressing this in his contemporary situation, strikingly similar to our polarized world, articulates clearly that this business of “making peace” - “reconciliation” - the creation of “one humanity” and to reconcile the united humanity to God was ***the purpose*** of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Paul says:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Ephesians 2:14-18 NIV

We are convinced that our uniquely multi-ethnic and multi-cultural “cross roads of the world” context in our Metro New York District is an ideal arena for the embodiment and proclamation of God’s purpose in this scripture to be displayed.

Our vision of a reconciled humanity anticipates the apocalyptic vision of the “Church Triumphant” in Revelation 7:9-17.

This Revelation passage highlights diversity “**every nation, tribe, people and language**”, there is no hint of cultural insignificance or color blindness in this passage. Diversity is embraced and emphasized. But there is also no doubt that they are a united crowd and that, that which unites them all is the fundamental UNITY of their common experience. Unity is given full voice in the scene - “**in a loud voice**” - they all are doing one thing, glorifying God on His throne and the Lamb. And when the question of their identity is asked “**Who are they...?**” the answer is given “**...they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb**”. Their jubilant concerted celebration is rooted in their common identity - a common redemptive experience effected by the sacrificial action of the Lamb. They are the people of the Lamb and are consequently assured of His personal protection, His perpetual provision and what can only be described as His personal TLC (tender loving care) - His wiping “away every tear from their eyes”.

Our District’s Vision of hope is this display of Christian Unity in Diversity which is God’s clear YES to His Son Jesus’ “high priestly prayer” for “oneness” among His disciples. Jesus prays for their “oneness” as being the factor which is necessary to bear credible and convincing witness of the truth of the Gospel. Sisters and brothers if there is ever a time that we need a

credible gospel - one that is the “power of God” to save those who believe it, its now. Our suffering, war-torn, confused, chaotic and values conflicted world is desperately in need of this salvation.

Our secularized, cynical and religiously disillusioned neo-pagan context here in the Northeastern USA is particularly desperate for the gospel’s credible and persuasive message. *Our vision is to be that beacon of hope held out to them in a dark and stormy time. Our witness will not be merely in word but an embodiment witness where collaboration with one another is placed above any attitudes of jealous comparisons between our churches. One where active cooperation with one another is the status quo instead of any accommodation to a subtle and seductive satanic temptation of competition against each other. Where the “already but not yet” preview of the “Church Triumphant” in a joyful celebration of **unity in diversity** is evidenced focused on the Sovereign Rule of God and on the saving sacrifice of the Lamb - Jesus Christ. Our vision of hope is free from any vestige of either **coerced uniformity** - reflective of unquestioned submission to an imposed dominant cultural model enforced by a colonial styled power or **siloed independence** - reflective of an apartheid-like, comfortable isolationist mentality effectively only producing struggling “separate but equal” church communities fighting for*

mere survival. Indeed, we see our “Promised Land” as a “Beloved Community” - not as an insipid generic bland “blob” but as a rich colorful “greater New York styled” tapestry. A diverse, joyful, festive, community united by the work of the Holy Spirit with an earnest conviction expressed in word and deed - pursuing FELLOWSHIP, PARTNERSHIP AND MENTORSHIP as the hallmarks of our Spirit generated and Spirit empowered unity in the midst of our diversity.

We therefore reiterate here some crucial elements we regard as necessary strategic outcomes for our District that we are convinced must be realized as we progress toward the realization of this vision:

- a) Efficient Communication between the local Churches and the District leadership and also between the local Churches of our District
- b) Effective Pastoral Leadership in every local Church
- c) Optimal Pastoral Wellness for every local Church pastor
- d) Intentional Lay Engagement in every local Church
- e) Purposeful Next Generation Engagement in the local Church
- f) Mobilization of Compassion, Justice and Immigration by the District in partnership with the local Church
- g) Active Missions (local & foreign) and Discipleship by and in every local Church

We are not yet in our “Promise Land” but our vision is clear. It is our hope. The reconciled Holy People of the Holy God” - United in Christ although beautifully Diverse - so that our children, our neighbors and our world would believe and be liberated by the transformative Good News we bring and be reconciled to God.

Recognizing the Gains of the Past - the established foundations that provide structures that enable mission advancement

“As I was with Moses,...”

We, as a District are keenly aware of major things God has done for us through our past leaders to take us to this point just as God’s ancient people were conscious of God’s miraculous actions through Moses before Joshua assumed leadership. I want to draw attention to three fundamental organizational structures which the Lord has enabled the District to establish over the years in order for the District’s mission to be effectively prosecuted. They are **The Manhattan Initiative, The Palmer Institute** and **The Tom Nees Center for Compassion, Justice and Immigration**. These are legacy structures in our district. I refer to them in that way because they celebrate the

contributions to our District by committed Nazarenes and leaders of the past that are continuing to influence in an incredible way our mission and ministry here and now.

The Manhattan Initiative

What we now know as the “**Manhattan Initiative**” began with a visionary ministry by Nazarene leaders in the 1970’s to the world wide celebrated performing arts community in New York City’s theatre district. This ministry graciously attracted the sacrificial giving and voluntary participation of ordinary Nazarenes across the US & Canada. The Lamb’s Church of the Nazarene, the congregation that spearheaded this ministry, acquired prime real estate in Mid-town Manhattan and that facility was used by God to be a vehicle of His grace to bring transformation to many persons associated with the theatre district and to other “Manhattanites”. The time came however, when the real estate associated with this ministry went from being a valuable asset and tool in accomplishing this unique ministry to being a threat of serious financial liability to the District. Today, we celebrate the fact that God gave the leadership of the District at that time direction, insight, expertise and wisdom so that what was threatening to become an unbearable financial burden was transformed into a financial asset dedicated to the support of

Metro New York District mission and ministry, not only in Manhattan but throughout the District.

As you know, we live and do ministry in a part of the world where the cost of doing ministry (as is the cost of living in general) is such that the financial model of District support through traditional church giving would be far from adequate to sustain effective ministry here in our District. But God, through our leaders then, established the The Manhattan Initiative, as a wholly owned integrated auxiliary of the Metro New York District designed to leverage that Midtown Manhattan property as a resource to complement the financial support of the District provided by the churches - making ministry possible. The Manhattan Initiative assumes ownership and/or management of all distressed properties owned by the District so that they would not become financial liabilities to the District but instead be either rehabilitated and/or disposed of to garner financial resources in support of the mission and ministry of the District.

The Palmer Institute

The other strategic structural arrangement for which our District is grateful to God is **The Palmer Institute**. The Palmer Institute is named after Phoebe Palmer, considered to be one of the iconic New York based pioneers of the American Holiness Movement

out of which the Church of the Nazarene arose. It is the structure in our District that facilitates and oversees the theological educational preparation of individuals preparing for the credentialed ministry. For persons seeking to be Ordained Elders or Ordained Deacons in the Church of the Nazarene, the Institute is concerned first of all with the clarification of their calling to ministry through a standardized process and then there after the Palmer Institute offers guidance and support in navigating the ongoing process of theological preparation for credentialing.

In addition to this, the Palmer Institute is seeking to spearhead a program in partnership with the local church for the systematic training of lay people so that they are better equipped to engage in the ministry of our Nazarene mission, that of making “Christlike Disciples in the nations”.

The Tom Nees Center for Compassion Justice and Immigration

The latest strategic structure to be added to the organizational structure of our District is the **Tom Nees Centre for Compassion, Justice and Immigration**. Our District has been inspired by the life and ministry of the late Dr Tom Nees who played a major role in catalyzing a resurgence across the US & Canada Region of a fundamental element in the DNA of our

beloved denomination - the ministry of God's Good News in word and deed to marginalized people in society.

The Tom Nees Centre for Compassion, Justice and Immigration has committed itself to a) raise awareness b) act practically on behalf of people who need help - even if it is only to "shepherd" them in the direction where they can get that help so that they will not be taken advantage of and c) to partner, in Christ name with those who are advocating for the interest of the marginalized and the underserved to bring hope to them. Our approach here is unapologetically Wesleyan and we are convinced is historically Nazarene. The integrated emphasis of love of neighbor, hospitality to the stranger and the distinctively Christian mission of Reconciliation between God and people (made in God's image) and also between people and people is a focus of the Tom Nees Center for Compassion, Justice and Immigration. Reconciliation is of utmost importance to us. We believe compassion to the stranger is the reflection of God's loving heart in a heartless world. Let me be clear here that this strategic structure of our District was not formed as a "knee jerk" reaction response to the current immigration crisis that has rocked our country and our area in particular but was put in place before all this happened. It seemed to have been a God ordained prophetic preparation that has helped us to be able to partner with those

local churches that seek to respond in some way to the plight of the flood of recent immigrants. Although in only a limited way, we have been able to point a way forward to some immigrants even among our clergy who have been stuck in a broken immigration system in which they had become vulnerable pawns to those who seek to exploit them.

Reflecting on the Guarantees of the Faithful Promises of a Promise Keeping God

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you”

In this our time of transition there needs to be absolute clarity as to what changes and what does not change. Let me say this categorically, leadership personnel will always change. Human leaders by definition come and go. There are transitions for different reasons but our God never transitions. For ancient Israel, as for us the absolute constant between the past, present and future is the presence of our unchanging and unchangeable God. The writer to the Hebrews affirms ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8 NIV)***

God promised to be with Joshua ***in the same way*** as He was with Moses. I am confident today that just as God was with them

then He is with us now. Yes, like them we are guaranteed today with this Promise of His assuring Presence - His accompanying mighty Power, His gracious, miraculous Provisions and His impregnable secure Protection - because (as the poet puts it) “the same God then is the same God now”.

In a few moments in this assembly God will give us new leadership as we vote for a new District Superintendent and with that we look forward to a new day. As a District we have made this year a year of prayer in this regard. We adopted the theme “The People of Promise are the People of Prayer”. We committed ourselves to set times of prayer for seven significant needs of our District. But number one on our list was the earnest seeking of The Lord in all our churches particularly for His provision of “the one”. We are confident that the faithful “Lord of the Harvest” to whom we have been praying has answered our prayers to prepare and select His anointed and appointed servant. We are therefore excited and prepared today to receive with joy “the one” He is sending into His Metro New York District “harvest field” to be our next District Superintendent.

With God’s promised Presence with us we expect God to be the same “Way Maker” He has always been to part our “Red Seas” and “Jordon Rivers - even if they are in flood stage and to break down every barrier - our “Jericho Walls” if/when we encounter them. We expect Him to provide “manna” from heaven if

necessary to meet all our “needs according to His riches in Glory through Christ Jesus”. We expect our “Shield and Defender” to protect us with His “pillar of cloud” shading us against any and all of the threats of “wilderness sun-stroke” or any other destructive threat that may confront us as we journey towards the “vision of hope” as the “people of promise”. We expect our “Holy Spirit Faithful Guide” to lead us by His “Pillar of Fire by Night” lighting up the darkness in contemporary Metro New York that we will encounter on the way. Confidently, we expect Him, as promised, to “lead us in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake”.

It is noteworthy to us that Moses famously asked for the assurance of the clear manifestation of the Divine presence as a condition of his embarking upon the project of leading God’s people and so as a District we do not take anything for granted but join Moses in his historic prayer of Exodus 33:12-17 at this time. Scripture says:

Moses said to the Lord, “...If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” And the Lord said to Moses, “I will do the very thing

you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.

Today we “Embrace God’s Future Overflowing with Hope” simply because we stand assured that the God of Moses and Joshua is our God too, He has not changed and the guarantee of His Presence with us is **just as** He was with them

Reaffirming God’s Clearly Stated Requirements for the Present Time

Fortitude is Required

I think this recurrent call for “strength and courage” in our template passage is clearly of first and foremost significance. It is stated three times there **“Be strong and courageous”** (v.6) **“Be strong and very courageous”** (v.7) **Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”**(v.9). The absence of this requirement is a non starter. Its the first requirement. The idea here is best summed up in the term “Fortitude”. Fortitude is defined in the dictionary as the “mental and emotional strength in facing difficulty, adversity, danger or temptation courageously”. That this is demanded by God is clear but even better realization is the revelation that “God never demands of us that which His

grace does not supply”. No wonder then that this requirement for fortitude by God is linked directly to the emphasized assurance of His supportive presence - **“for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”**(v.9). It is God Himself who gives the strength and courage that He requires. We are assured of this by a famous and highly encouraging dialogue between God and the Apostle Paul (recorded in 2 Corinthians 12). Here we learn that our need to totally depend on God, who promises to be with us, is the source and secret of our fortitude even when we in ourselves feel that we are at our weakest. Paul writes:

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV

Christian fortitude is directly related to one’s total dependence on “God who is our Strength”. The Reformer Martin Luther captures the idea so well in the timeless iconic hymn- “A mighty fortress is our God”. I can’t help but quoting all four verses.

1 A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;

our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.

For still our ancient foe
does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

2 Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side,
the Man of God's own choosing.

You ask who that may be?

Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

3 And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.

The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo! his doom is sure;

one little word shall fell him.
4 That Word above all earthly powers
no thanks to them abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours
through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!

Commitment to Scripture is Required

The second clear requirement in addition to fortitude is to have an unwavering commitment to Scripture.

...Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

You will have noticed that I have deliberately cited and quoted from Scripture over and over in this my last report. This is because I want to emphasize that the absolute foundation of our

Wesleyan faith tradition is the primacy of Scripture. In fact Scripture is the lens through which we in the Wesleyan tradition view, understand and evaluate everything. We view important things such as Church History, Scholarly Reason and even our Personal Religious Experiences in the light of Scripture. This second requirement that God “commands” - an unswerving commitment to Scripture then speaks directly to the core of our very theological and ecclesiological identity. The primacy of Scripture, the consistent application of valid methods in the interpretation of it and the glad and complete submission to its theological and ethical directions are absolutely non negotiable for us. We are Wesleyans, we like our patron theologian, John Wesley, are the people of “one book”.

We must indeed listen to and face the “existential questions” of our time and context. In doing so however, we confidently and consistently respond to them with the answers we hear from Scripture through the careful study of it. Yes, we can expect to be pushed, pulled and prodded by varied approaches to Scripture but as Metro New York District Nazarenes, let us not “turn to the right (popular fundamentalism) or the left (theological liberalism)”. Metro New York District Church of the Nazarene, let us hold the line of our tradition on Scripture, do not waver. Apostolic Scripture rightly understood, must be for us the final

authority for doctrine and ethics for our message and our manner of life.

We reaffirm today then that fortitude - derived from total dependence on our dependable God and an unswerving commitment to submit both in belief and lifestyle, faith and conduct to Scripture are God's non-negotiable requirements for our present time of transition. As it was for Joshua then, we hear afresh today the call to embrace God's requirements as we embrace God's Future Overflowing with Hope for guaranteed God given success.

Realizing the Necessary Preparation that Must Be in Place for the Preferred Future to Become a Reality

When one reads the biblical record of Joshua's time it remarkably demonstrates the faithfulness of God in keeping those promises given to him at the time of transition. We note, among other things, the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River, the celebrated fall of the seemingly impregnable Jericho Wall. We note also Joshua's army's victorious conquests of city after city in the biblical record. We wonder at the most incredible miracle of the sun standing still so that Joshua could complete one of his military campaigns. With all this in mind there is a disturbing footnote to Joshua's leadership. This had to do with the obvious

lack of adequate preparation for the transition in Joshua's own case to effective Spiritual Leadership of the next generation after he died.

Joshua can never be faulted in this for not preaching cogently and truthfully. His iconic sermon in Joshua 24 underlines these facts. Here he persuasively outlines God's mighty acts of faithfulness in history to his people (verses 1 to 13) and then concludes with a challenge to his audience to respond. It was clear. Joshua drives home the point that the only adequate response to God's faithfulness was exclusive devotion and faithfulness in return to God (v.14). He does this by making his own position clear in the following immortal words:

But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua 24:15 NIV

It is note worthy that his immediate audience was completely persuaded and gave indication of their whole hearted

enthusiastic commitment in response to Joshua. (see Joshua 24:16-18)

So why do we have the following tragic story recorded in Judges 2?

After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to their own inheritance. The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel. Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the Lord's anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

Judges 2:6-13 NIV

We today are fore-warned and therefore fore-armed by this story in this our time of transition. Our eloquent and persuasive proclamation of our heartfelt experiences of God's mighty acts, our personal commitment to Him and even a visible enthusiastic contemporary acceptance of our ministry enhanced by "signs and wonders" may not be enough to guarantee the preparation of the next generation to be the expression of our hope. Our responsibility to steward and pass on this HOPE must involve an intentional strategy to disciple our children, their friends - the people of the "next generation" to experience for themselves the goodness of God and be faithful to Him.

Throughout the US & Canada the data shows that we in the Church of the Nazarene have an aging clergy along with an aging laity in most of our Churches. We are on a trajectory of decline. So at this time as we in the Metro New York District seek to "Embrace God's Future Overflowing with Hope", our District must intentionally pay priority attention to strategically planning for and sacrificially resourcing ministry and mission with the next generation in full focus. Nothing is more important for us at this time.

In this agenda we can start by hearing afresh the directive of the Apostle Paul to Timothy as a word to us at this time so that we may avoid the tragedy of the Joshua era transition.

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:1-2 NIV

We must realize that in preparation for the preferred future of Christian Unity in Diversity to be expressed in solid courageous Bible believing, loving holy living in the next generation, we must carefully identify, attract, recruit and train reliable young people who will become “qualified to teach others”. There must be an intentional and effective strategic mentoring agenda as a crucial priority now more than ever when we are poised to “Embrace God’s Future Overflowing with Hope”.

I leave you my dear Metro New York District with the words of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans as he concluded his explanation of what he termed “the Gospel of God”. In these words he places a literary exclamation mark of hope seen in God’s deliberate intention to include all of humanity, in spite of their diversity, in the Glorious hope of His comprehensive Salvation. Metro New York District Church of the Nazarene hear the words of Scripture:

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name." Again, it says, "Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him." And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:4-13 NIV

Respectfully Submitted

Rev. Samuel Carl W Vassel DMin.

