

A SENT PEOPLE
Report to the North Arkansas District Church of the Nazarene
Dr. Mark A. Lindstrom, District Superintendent
June 11, 2019

General Superintendent, Dr. Carla Sunberg; Southern Nazarene University president, Dr. Keith Newman; Pastors, Delegates, and friends of this 67th Assembly of the North Arkansas District Church of the Nazarene, it is my joy to greet you in the name of Jesus, our Risen Savior King.

THANK YOU

I am honored to present my twentieth-sixth report as a minister in the Church of the Nazarene, but my first report as Superintendent of the North Arkansas District. I am grateful to the District Advisory Committee for their willingness to consider me for this new role, and to Dr. Sunberg for her trust in appointing me as superintendent. It is a privilege to serve the Church, and for the opportunity to do so in this role, on this district, is a high honor. Thank you, Dr. Sunberg. Thank you, DAC. Thank you, North Arkansas Nazarenes.

As I begin, I would like to give special thanks to Melanie Thrasher, our new district office administrator. Like me, she is brand new to this work, and in some ways she and I have been building the car as we've been driving the car. Although she has only been on the job since March, she is a quick-study, and has taken to the task with great energy and skill. And always with a smile! Much of the resources you hold in your hand today are the result of her work. Thanks, Melanie, for saying 'yes' to the opportunity to serve the district. We're better because you are part of the team!

I also want to express my appreciation to our district leadership team; our district secretary, Rev. Steve Thrasher; our district treasurer, Mrs. Susan Baker, and the members of our District Advisory Board: Rev. Randall Beaty, Mr. Curtis Clements, Mr. Don Guinn, Mr. Bill Millburn, Rev. Ron Riddle, Rev. Mark Snodgrass, Rev. Steve Thrasher, and Dr. Scott Woodward. Each of these servant-leaders have welcomed and assisted me in this transition in numerous ways—personally and professionally. I am thankful for good friends to travel with on this new journey.

In addition, it has been a privilege to work with the Board of Ministry team members, the District

Finance and Nominating Committee members, the District Property Board members, and our great Essential ministry leadership teams—led by our Nazarene Missions International president, Mrs. Zina and Rev. Larry Weihe; our Nazarene Youth International president, Rev. Peter Kline; and our Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries director, Rev. Mark Snodgrass. Each of these teams have carried on unique ministry responsibilities throughout the year—serving our district church family creatively and with great joy. Thank you to everyone who volunteered on each of these teams to make our district better!

All of these persons provided great transitional leadership for our district last year, and I am so thankful for their work on behalf of all of us.

I am particularly grateful to my predecessors, Dr. Barney and Joyce Baggott, and Dr. Randy and Debbie Berkner.

The Baggotts took an interest in Kelly and me when we were still seminary students, even calling us to our very first pastorate in Tennessee in my mid-twenties; and then later took a chance on calling us to serve the Bentonville Church on this district from 2003-2010. Barney gave me the opportunity to serve in leadership on this district well before he probably should have. For that gift, I am forever grateful, but have also been compelled by his example to take chances on future leaders in my own years of ministry as a pastor—something I plan to continue doing as a district superintendent. When Barney called to congratulate me on my appointment, I told him without any reservation that he is the reason I am now a district superintendent. He lit the match of district service that has stayed with me to this day. Like all of you, I miss Joyce (who is enjoying the blessings of heaven today), her sweet smile and gentle strength, and I

really wish Barney could be here today. I am forever thankful to them for their investment in my life. Leaders invest in us, so we can invest in others. That's the nature and responsibility of leadership.

I am also thankful for Randy and Debbie Berkner, for their faithful stewardship of this district for almost a decade. I have known the Berkners since I was a college student at Trevecca and consider them mentors and friends. They provided exemplary leadership, and this district is stronger and healthier because they responded to God's call to come here in 2009. I know they are enjoying a well-deserved retirement in middle Tennessee, but both of them have graciously received every phone call, email, and text Melanie and I have sent them. They are truly servants of the Church. I know you join me in thanking God for their lives and service to Christ and our district.

Most importantly, I want to say a special thank you to my wife, Kelly. When Kelly and I began dating during our Trevecca years, we both knew our future together meant serving the Lord through ministry together. While the roles we've played have changed as the seasons of life have changed, we continue to seek the Lord together. More than twenty-five years later, Kelly remains a faithful and supportive voice of reason in my life. Kelly, I love you and thank God you are my wife and very best friend. I also want to acknowledge our four amazing kiddos, Ivan, Peter, Norah, and William. Without their willingness to join Kelly and me on the journey back to North Arkansas, there is no way we would've ever been able to say 'yes' to the invitation of Dr. Sunberg and our district advisory committee. Kelly and I have always considered ministry an adventure, and each new chapter has been different and exciting. Now, we are able to share this all with these wonderful children, who have proven themselves to be quite resilient. They have handled everything in their little lives being new with amazing grace: a new home, a new town, a new church, a new district, new schools, new friends, everything new. They're still not quite sure what my new job means! That's okay—I'm not quite sure yet either!! I so look forward to sharing my family with you in the years ahead, because I know you will love them, include them, and pray for them as they embrace the entire district family as their church family.

REASONS TO CELEBRATE

The most important factor in people enjoying the work they do is the team they are able to work with. I loved the pastors on this district when I was pastoring in Bentonville, and I am so thankful that same collegial spirit remains among the pastors on the district. Dr. Sunberg, we have the very best pastors anywhere in the denomination...and it's a joy and privilege to serve with these gifted men and women. I would love for all our pastors (lead pastors and staff pastors...ordained and licensed) to stand. Pastors, thank you for your leadership. Thank you for saying 'yes' to Jesus when He called you to serve. Thank you for your team-minded attitude, and willingness to give your life to others. The Kingdom of God is better because you are part of Jesus' choicest servants. Please join me in expressing your appreciation for our pastors!

I am excited to report to you today that our district showed growth in every major statistical category except for our average worship attendance, which was down slightly this year. But, as we all know, the number of people attending our services only tells us part of the total reach of our ministries. As I hoped to communicate with our post-Easter newsletter this year, we are called to focus our ministries beyond our worship services—beyond the walls of our churches and into our neighbor's lives in creative and compassionate ways. I am thrilled that almost all our churches are reaching out beyond our traditional worship services to impact our communities. During Holy Week, our churches touched, in some way, almost 20,000 people in North Arkansas, which is five times the number who attend our services on a given Sunday. I celebrate that and want us to raise the bar on how we are creatively reaching out, partnering with others in our community, always thinking of how we join the mission of God outside the walls of our churches; being a good neighbor by loving and serving our neighbors.

I am celebrating today that through your ministries this past year, 461 people became followers of Jesus Christ. I believe that's a pretty conservative number, since it's a little difficult to measure. Thirty-five of our churches reported at least one conversion during the past year. Nothing can raise the excitement level of a congregation like seeing people come to faith as a result of your ministry. Next year, I pray 100% of

our churches discover the joy of leading others to saving faith in Christ. With the Spirit's help, we can do this, amen?

You can see in your booklet every church who helped lead someone to Christ this past year, but I'd like to acknowledge these churches who helped at least five people come to faith this past year. When I call your church, I'd like for the pastors and delegations to stand and remain standing:

Conversions (five or more):

Crossroads Cowboy	179
Greenbrier	43
Bentonville Community	28
Rogers First	21
Fort Smith First	20
Bethel Heights Iglesia	18
Van Buren First	16
Heber Springs	13
Conway First	12
Jonesboro Forest Home	10
Searcy	10
Siloam Springs	10
The Vineyard	10
Clinton	7
True Grace Gospel	7
Beebe	5
Bentonville Iglesia	5
Fayetteville	5
Rogers Primera	5
Springdale Primera	5

When people come to faith, baptism is the natural, next step. Baptism is a chance to celebrate, to formally welcome people into the fellowship of the redeemed. As a pastor, nothing gave me more joy than watching our children, teens, and adults experience baptism for the first time. Hearing their testimonies and celebrating with them sends a shot of adrenaline through a congregation like nothing else! I am thrilled to tell you that as a district we baptized 270 new Christians this past year, 64 more than we did just one year ago. Twenty-seven of our churches reported baptizing at least one new Christian during the past year. That's awesome! But, friends, how awesome will it be when 100% of our churches can come to assembly and share the testimony of at least one person who was baptized into the Christian faith

as a result of your ministry? With the Spirit's help, we can do this, amen?

You can see in your booklet every church who celebrated the sacrament of baptism this past year, but I'd like to acknowledge these churches who baptized at least five people come to faith this past year. When I call your church, I'd like for the pastors and delegations to stand and remain standing:

Baptisms (5 or more)

Crossroads Cowboy	106
Greenbrier	25
Rogers First	18
Searcy	16
Bentonville Community	14
Van Buren First	14
Jonesboro Forest Home	12
Fort Smith First	6
Beebe	5
Clarksville New Hope	5
Rogers Primera	5
Springdale Primera	5

Logically, once people come to faith and are baptized, we will want to begin the process of moving them toward membership in our churches. Friends, membership is not about names on a roll, nor is it about institutional sustainability. Membership is about full partnership, the chance for our people to become stake-holders in the ministry of the church. Membership classes are our opportunity to invite people to embrace our values, feel ownership of our ministry, and become bearers and sharers of our collective story. I taught every membership class I could throughout my years as a pastor, because I wanted everyone in my church to be as excited about Jesus and the Church of the Nazarene as I am. I wanted to make sure they knew exactly who we are by sharing our Articles of Faith and our Covenants of Christian Character and Conduct with them first-hand. I wanted people to know who we are, and what it means to be a responsible member of our great church. And I wanted to know them, personally, because every new member is a potential servant-leader for the future opportunities of ministry God is calling our church to pursue. Pastors, thank you for owning this value in your own ministry, and for inviting your people to this awesome responsibility and privilege as members of the church.

In fact, I am celebrating today that through your ministries, 345 Christians became members of the Church of the Nazarene in North Arkansas this past year, an increase of 60 from just one year ago. Twenty-eight of our churches received at least one New Nazarene. That's awesome! But, friends, how awesome will it be when 100% of our churches can come to assembly and report that at least one person has been received into the membership of the Church of the Nazarene through our ministries? With the Spirit's help, we can do this, amen?

You can see in your booklet every church who welcomed a new person to the Church of the Nazarene, but I'd like to acknowledge these churches who welcomed at least five new members to the Church of the Nazarene this past year. When I call your church, I'd like for the pastors and delegations to stand and remain standing:

New Nazarenes (5 or more)

Crossroads Cowboy	160
Greenbrier	24
Jonesboro Forest Home	21
Rogers First	19
Bethel Heights Iglesia	13
Bentonville Community	12
Van Buren First	10
Conway First	9
Beebe	8
Fayetteville First	7
True Grace Gospel	7
Mountain Home Twin Lakes	6
Springdale Primera	6
Bentonville Iglesia	5
Jacksonville	5
Liberty	5
Rogers Primera	5

I must also acknowledge and celebrate your faithfulness, stewardship, and support of the global mission, our retired ministers, our district, and our Southern Nazarene University. Nazarenes continue to demonstrate that we are some of the most generous Christians on the planet. We demonstrate, by our fiscal priorities, that we believe we are blessed to be a blessing. Thank you for investing in the ministry of The Church, even as you care for your own local

church's ministry. Both are vital. Both are necessary. I am humbled by your sacrifice.

I am excited to share with you that your generosity has resulted in:

- \$412,103 given to the World Evangelism Fund (5.69%)
- \$164,801 given to the Pensions and Benefits Fund (2.33%)
- \$163,691 given to Southern Nazarene University (2.26%)
- \$400,018 given to the District Unified Fund (5.58%)

Each of the totals represent some of the highest collective giving to others in the history of the North Arkansas District. Thank you for making it possible for us to report to Dr. Sunberg that, as a district, we have paid more than 100% of our requested apportionments this fiscal year! Forty-two of our churches reached all their giving goals for others this past year, and are listed in your booklet today as "Stewardship Honor Roll" churches. We commend you for your faithfulness and partnership.

I recognize every dollar given represents the fruit and prayers of Nazarene laypersons and pastors all across North Arkansas. Thank you, friends, for being committed to tithing to your local church personally, and for extending that spirit for generosity through the sacrificial giving of your local church to partner with other churches across our district in reaching these goals for others.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Under the leadership of our DS, Dr. Randy Berkner, and the calling of God upon Pastor Ron and Wanda Riddle, our district launched Crossroads Cowboy Church in El Paso, Arkansas, which is located between Conway and Beebe.

Since their organization in 2014, Crossroads Cowboy Church has grown from 0 to 889 in average attendance; received 928 new members into the Church of the Nazarene; helped welcome 1,060 boys and girls, men and women into the family of God through conversion; and have baptized 581 new Christ-followers. All of this in just the past five years.

They have done all this while being fully supportive of all global, regional, and district church ministries. In addition, they have planted the Crossroads Cowboy Church in Pleasant Plains, led by Mr. Jeremy and Jammie Cox—who have been mentored by Pastors Ron Riddle and Randall Beaty from our Search Church, a ministry which is currently reaching over 80 people per week. This past year, Crossroads two ministries—El Paso and Pleasant Plains—welcomed 160 new Nazarenes into their membership, which is almost twenty percent of their weekly average attendance! Like the floods we've experienced the last few weeks across Arkansas, this is pretty much unprecedented. I pray you have taken some time to recognize that, as a district, we have been front-row witnesses to a move of God—Acts 2 type of stuff—through this new ministry on our district. There are no awards for something like this. All we can do is stop and acknowledge our awesome God and pray that what the Lord has done at Crossroads He might choose to do in each of our churches, in our communities, and through our ministries. As brothers and sisters, we mourn with those who mourn, and we also rejoice with those who rejoice. My prayer is that the Lord will favor all of us, wherever we are serving on this district, with a fresh move of His Spirit, so that we can all experience the winds of Pentecost through the ministries of our church, just as Pastor Riddle has at Crossroads.

As a result of these criteria, today we are excited to award them, once again, with the General Superintendent's Growth Award. Receiving this award from Dr. Sunberg is possible because of Crossroads' commitment to receiving new members into the Church of the Nazarene, supporting the larger church by meeting all their allocation goals to the global church, our district, and to Southern Nazarene University, and their commitment to support the priority of church planting with people, prayers, and financial support. We present this award with a prayer that God will continue to add His favor to their ministry. As witnesses of this ministry, who can see what God is able to do, may each of us be inspired to pray bold prayers and take big risks within our own lives and ministries in the places God has situated our churches all across the district. May this story be told a hundred-fold through our shared mission to bring Christ's kingdom to bear on the broken places and broken people all around us.

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I believe God wants to do just that. Matthew tells us in his Gospel:

³⁵ *“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.”*³⁶ *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*³⁷ *Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”*³⁸ *Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*¹ *Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.”* Matthew 9:35-10:1 (NIV)

- Jesus—Ministry was to his community/neighbors

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages...” (9:35a)

At the superintendent's retreat in February, General Superintendent David Busic was talking with us about the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. In that great message, he focused on John 4:4, which tells us that after Jesus left Judea to go back to Galilee, that John makes an interesting statement: *“But he had to go through Samaria.”* John 4:4 (NRSV).

The truth is, Jesus most certainly DID NOT have to pass through Samaria. Jews had been avoiding that route for years, choosing a much longer way around Samaria to avoid walking through an area filled with people they did not want to engage along the way.

Jesus made an intentional choice to go through Samaria, but John is correct in his wording: Jesus HAD to pass that way, because Jesus was always compelled by the mission of God. Jesus did not wait for people to come to him, nor did he only desire to minister to people who looked like him, voted like him, spoke the same language as him, or shared the same values as him. Jesus left his own zones of comfort to go where God's mission was sending him. He served every person, so he could share the Kingdom of God with every person.

So, in leaving the safety of his comfort zone, Jesus was sent. What was the nature of Jesus message and ministry? Matthew tells us that too:

- Jesus—Message (teaching and preaching) was good news

“...teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom...” (9:35b)

And our message must be good news as well. Our neighbors need to know a whole lot more about what we’re for than what we’re against. They need to sense and know that we are for them...that we are there for them. When they speak to us, our message, attitude, and Christian witness must reflect our Savior whose message was good news to those who heard it.

We are the people who tell of God’s mercy to redeem us, God’s power to restore us, and God’s love to reconcile us to Himself, to our neighbors, and to ourselves. We are bearers of hope. In a world that does not know the way, we are called to point people to the Way, the Truth, and the Life. How we speak to people, and how we relate to people is the primary means by which we are able to do that. I call upon our churches to make a commitment to be good neighbors—in the individual places where we live, and in the communities where God has physically placed our churches.

In other words, through his message and through his ministry, Jesus was intentional about bringing the Kingdom of God to bear on the world around him.

- Jesus—Healing hurts, Healing lives

“...and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (9:35c-36)

Jesus’ heart was broken because of the brokenness of those around him. He noticed it. He was moved by it. And He moved toward it. Each of these three aspects are what it means to be compassionate: to notice, to be moved, in order to move us toward need. Jesus could not stay within the safe places. He was compelled to go where God was sending him—into the lives of his neighbors where people are hurting,

and lives are broken. Jesus wanted to be where the Father is, and Jesus knew the Father is not always found in the Temple, but He can always be found among people...especially the poor, especially the marginalized, especially the broken. And if we are committed to following him, guess what? We will follow and we will join him there! Amen? With the Spirit’s help, we can do this, amen?

Sisters and brothers, Jesus now sends us. In fact, he wraps up this ministry to others by asking his disciples to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out worker to his harvest.

- Jesus—Sending Us

³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” ¹ Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.” (9:37-10:1)

This is HIS harvest. Yet, He asks the disciples to pray for God to raise up workers to bring in the harvest. But, in a fascinating turn of events, his disciples discover the answer to their prayer is actually them, because the very next verse tells us that having prayed for workers for the harvest, Jesus then sends the same disciples out to be the answer to their own prayers!

THE INVITATION: 9:37-38

As I wrap this up, I have an invitation for each of us. Hear Jesus’ words again in verses 37-38: *³⁷ “Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

I believe Jesus wants to answer that prayer, but in order to answer it, we must pray it. I am inviting every person here to join me this year in praying for the Lord of the harvest to send workers to His harvest. I am inviting every person here to join me this year in being willing to be part of the answer the Lord is providing.

If you have your phone with you today (and I know you do!), would you join me in setting your alarm to 9:37 each morning or evening (your choice—am or

pm), and praying for the Lord of the harvest to send workers to His harvest? Would you remain in prayer until your clock turns over to 9:38, and then tell the Father you are willing to be part of the answer to that prayer?

In light of verses 37-38, since my first month on the job, in my own spirit, I have felt my prayer for us directed in four ways:

- Workers to gather the harvest within our local churches—servant leaders
- Workers to gather the harvest within our shared global mission—the call of God
- Workers to gather the harvest within our district—church planters
- Willingness to be the answer to this prayer, as God wills—a surrendered life

Jesus promises us the harvest is great. People are still without hope apart from Christ. Our news is still true, and it's supposed to be good. Our Lord is still in the business of saving lives, amen? That means we can't be negative, hopeless, or complacent, because the harvest is ready now! I have not been anywhere on our district yet where I did not go away with a sense of hope for what God can do in every local church, or in the community where God has placed our churches. I pass through communities where there is no Wesleyan/Holiness presence, and immediately start thinking about what God could do there through the optimistic message of grace found in the holiness tradition. We need to partner together to seek the Lord, friends, and ask Him to raise up workers to gather in this harvest of people and places. Yet, in our fervent prayers, don't be shocked when the Lord

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Mark A. Lindstrom
District Superintendent

actually turns toward you and me and says to us, "I'm sending you!" What an awesome thing to discover that we are often times God's answer to the needs within our churches, within our communities, across our district, and all throughout the world.

I know this is a courageous and challenging prayer to pray...Lord, send me! Especially in the 21st century, which is why, like you, I want all the help I can get. So, pastors, I have a gift for you.

This is a great book for doing ministry in uncharted territory...where all the old paradigms are no longer producing the same fruit as they did before, but where failing to lead is not an option. We must lead. God's call is still upon us. Christ's Great Commission is still our mission. When we begin pastor reports later today, pastors, I'd like you to come down to pick up one of these books as your report is being shown to the assembly. Pastors, I strongly encourage you to read this book. I give it to you with a prayer that it will assist your ministry in bearing much fruit in the year ahead.

We serve a missional God. A God who is willing to go! This is revealed to us within the nature of God himself. The Father sends the Son. The Son sends the Spirit. And the Spirit sends the Church. That's us. Brothers and sisters let us pray for the Father to send and let us offer to be sent into the places where God is beckoning us to follow Him. It is there we will discover a great harvest, we will meet God, and we will discover or re-discover the adventure and the joy of following Jesus. With the Spirit's help, we can do this, amen? Let's go! I am so glad to be on this journey with you.