

REPORT TO THE 59TH ALASKA DISTRICT ASSEMBLY

Theme: Returning to Our Roots

MICHAEL R. COUCH/ DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT/ SIXTH REPORT

MAY 29TH, 2009

Dr. Jesse Middendorf and Susan, Dr. David Alexander and Sandy, Esteemed Pastors of the Alaska District, and Beloved laity from across our Great State, welcome to the 59th District assembly of the Church of the Nazarene in Alaska.

INTRODUCTION: ALASKA

I always like to take the first moments of my report to thank God for giving us the privilege of serving our Lord Jesus in this incredible place we call home, **ALASKA**.

The state that has more shoreline than all the contiguous states in the lower 48 put together. The state where pristine waters teem with the largest fish in North America. The state where four of the tallest peaks in North America provide our vista. The state where our National Bird is almost as common a sight as the sparrow. The State where America's most loved and feared animals literally roam in our back yards. A place where storms of such ferocious magnitude rumble across our landscape that if we were in the lower 48 the weather channel would need a two hour special each day just to report Alaskan weather. The Land of the Midnight Sun and Total Darkness. The land of the Aurora Borealis, magical night lights of white, yellow, red, green, that dance on the stage of our winter nights. The state of deep fjords and ice blue glaciers. There is no other place like Alaska, and we love it. It is here that God has called us to serve.

Yet for all of its vastness and unparalleled grandeur, its transcendent glory, we must never lose sight of why we are here. God placed us here because mankind's mortal enemies **SIN** and **DEATH** still govern God's creation with the intention of destroying everything and everyone. We are not here by happenstance but by Divine Calling. We are Christ's ambassadors, knowing that God is making His appeal through us. We are here as His heralds, proclaiming in season and out, "Today is the day of God's favor, today is the day

of His salvation.” For you and me this is our only day, tomorrow’s work will rest with those who follow. **MAY WE BE FOUND FAITHFUL.**

IN THE NEXT SEVERAL MINUTES I WANT TO SET UP A JUXTAPOSITION:

To **REVIEW** last years accomplishments, and to **REFUEL** our Vision for the future.

FIRST, LET’S REVIEW

Travel with me across our district. (**map**)

THE SOUTHEAST

OUR CHURCHES----JUNEAU, KETCHIKAN, SITKA

If you’ve never had the privilege of visiting our states panhandle I’m sorry. What a place of extreme beauty. A land of temperate rain forest, with up to 300 inches of rain a year, and in Juneau epic snows. Our famed Inland Passage, with Islands bigger than some states.

IN THESE OFF-ROAD CHURCHES GOD IS MOVING IN OBVIOUS POWER.

Ketchikan had the highest worship attendance in recent decades. Three years ago they were running 25 this year they average 55. What’s even better is that all of our churches in the southeast have brand new Christian disciples in them. It may be old fashion in some parts of the world but here it is common place to find altars lined with those seeking the saving and sanctifying power of God’s grace. This coming year our Juneau Church will become a multi-cultural congregation. They intend to start a Hispanic work in September. Our church in Sitka has a wonderful ministry to the native teens from across our state who attend Mount Edgecumbe High School. People are finding Christ as Lord in southeast Alaska through the ministry of the Church of the Nazarene.

THE NORTH (INTERIOR AND NOME)

OUR CHURCHES---FAIRBANKS FIRST, NORTH POLE, TWO RIVERS AND NOME.

This is the ‘ice box’ of Alaska and the ‘bakery’. It is not uncommon in the winter to record 60 below zero and in the summer to reach 90 above.

Here you will find the Sentinel of Alaska - 20,300 foot Mt. DENALI - “The Great One.” This is the home of some of America’s greatest rivers the Yukon, the Susitna, the Kuskokwim, and others. The home of the indigenous Athabascan Indian, the Yup’ik and Inupiat Eskimo, and the famed Porcupine Caribou herd.

Alaska’s first Nazarene church began in Fairbanks in 1938, long before we were a State. Our Two Rivers church, the Northern most Nazarene church in the world has just completed the greatest year in their long history; numerically, financially, and with new members received. This Church decided two years ago to make prayer a cornerstone of their church. Since that time the church has experienced Revival, growth, and a greater impact on their rural community than can be explained naturally. Is it surprising they have experienced this as a result of prayer? No, it isn’t surprising it’s to be expected, our God answers prayer. A few years ago a healthy crowd on any given Sunday would have been 25 this year they averaged 48.

Jeran and Joy Marchbanks have served our Nome Church for two years and have recently resigned. Pastors Bill and Teresa Gartung from Idaho are moving to Nome in July. I need to tell you it takes special people to pastor in Nome. Isolated, impoverished people, hostile climate, this is a place where legends can be made. Several years ago the Great Nazarene missionary and icon, Harmon Schmelzenbach, said to Pastor Morrell in Nome. “I honor you for living here, I could not do it.” I want to thank Jeran and Joy for giving two years of their lives to our church in Nome, we send you forward with our love.

Interior Alaska is being bathed in prayer, God is listening. I SEE HIM MOVING AMONG THE CHURCHES.

[THE KENAI PENNINSULA , CORDOVA, KODIAK ISLAND AND VALDEZ](#)

OUR CHURCHES--- ANCHOR POINT, HOMER, NIKISKI, SEWARD, SOLDOTNA, CORDOVA, KODIAK ISLAND AND VALDEZ

From the island of Kodiak where the largest grizzly bear in the world rule the tundra, to Valdez which is the snowiest place at sea level in the world with over 350 inches a year. The beautiful azure blue of the Kenai River and the Fjords of the Prince William Sound, this beautiful part of Alaska is home to some of our strongest churches. Our Anchor Point Church, in a very rural setting, also had their greatest days of numerical growth this year. Last year their AM Worship was 42 this year they averaged 58.

Having observed these churches now for six years I can tell you almost all of them are stronger now than six years ago. Our God is up to something on the Kenai, Cordova, Valdez and Kodiak.

THE ANCHORAGE BOWL AND THE MAT-SU VALLEY

OUR CHURCHES--- CHAPEL OF THE CROSS, CHINESE GOSPEL, EAGLE RIVER, HILLCREST, JEWEL LAKE, RENEW, SAMOAN FIRST, SOULJOURN, PALMER, WASILLA LAKE, AND WEST VALLEY.

Home to over half of Alaska's population, God is stirring up new avenues of Missional outreach in these churches in the heart of Alaska.

Our Chapel of the Cross Church began a new multi-cultural ministry when they invited Pastor Stephen Yeh to join their staff to reach the diverse Asian population in Anchorage. Also this year, Pastor Fau has been named Alaska District Director of Samoan Ministries, with the intent of starting new Samoan Churches, possibly as early as this fall.

And...May I be the first to announce that next year at our District Assembly our Souljourn new start will become a fully organized church.

As a side note, we are working with Roberto Hodgson of our general Headquarters with the intent of starting a Nazarene Hispanic work in Juneau this fall and another in Anchorage soon. The Hispanic population in Alaska is growing five times faster than the general population of Alaska, we must be proactive in this arena of opportunity.

Many of our churches in the Bowl and Mat-Su Valley are showing signs of new life. With the dynamic leadership we have in our pastoral collegian across our district and our great God I believe in my heart that we are truly on the cusp of a great movement of God.

Let me conclude the review with a six year statistical chart

STATISTICS	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
MEMBERSHIP	1971	2002	2001	2004	1966	1970
SS						
ATTENDANCE	1285	1269	1178	1325	1343	1394
MORNING AM						
ATTENDANCE	1712	1677	1663	1724	1701	1711
NEW NAZARENES	97	111	76	85	145	76
MONEY RAISED	2,855,595	*4,312,975	3,434,953	3,449,143	3,621,716	4,221,889
NUMBER OF CHURCHES	23					26
*District Record						

What can we take to heart from this six year statistical chart?

Well, for one thing... we see that someone forgot to tell the Alaska Nazarenes that the US economy had tanked. Our people gave the second highest amount raised for all purposes in

the history of our district. We went over the 4 million mark for the second time in four years. That tells me we have healthy churches, giving people, and good pastoral leadership.

This year for the 59th consecutive year we have paid 100% of our NMI, World Evangelism Fund, and that allows us to support missions in 156 world areas. We are the only district in the world with this kind of record and I'm proud of you - Alaska pastors and people.

We have shown modest gains in both SS and AM attendance but we are going forward and that is "big" in these days of declining church attendance across America.

I wish we could show more new Nazarenes this year, for that would indicate transformed lives in Christ but we will do better next year. Am I satisfied? Yes, and no, I've always been a contented malcontent. I like what we've done but I always want more, and so do you. Pastor and people, we had a good year and next year will be better.

Now, let me discuss briefly a new Missional Incentive that is planned to help the churches in our District reach out into their communities with the intent to make disciples.

MISSIONAL GRANT \$10,000

The district advisory board wants to give back to our churches which have paid their funds by making available two \$5,000 grants. These grants are available to any church that qualifies. The intent is to award \$5,000 to any church who will use this money for a Missional emphasis that will help initiate, and sustain growth.

I encourage every pastor to write the district office and ask for a grant application. It must be completed in June and the grants will be awarded by the end of August.

ALASKA AWARDS

EVERY YEAR WE GIVE THE ALASKA AWARD TO CHURCHES THAT SHOWS A 5% INCREASE OVER THEIR LAST YEARS M.W. ATTENDANCE. WILL MY WIFE PLEASE COME AND ASSIST ME IN PRESENTING THESE AWARDS TO THE FOLLOWING CHURCHES AND PASTORS. CONGRATULATIONS!

ANCHOR POINT ---PASTOR STEVE MASTRE

CHAPEL OF THE CROSS----PASTOR WELDON SHUMAN

FAIRBANKS FIRST---PASTOR MARSHALL MAYFIELD

KETCHIKAN---PASTOR JOHN SCHAFFER

NIKISKI---PASTOR PAUL HARTLEY

RENEW FELLOWSHIP---PASTOR MIKE ROCHIN

SOULJOURN----PASTOR M.J. QUICK

TWO RIVERS----PASTOR BOB SUGDEN

WEST VALLEY—PASTOR PAUL TRISSEL

Would you please give these pastors and their churches a hand.

EAGLE AWARD

**THIS AWARD GOES TO THE CHURCH THAT SHOWED THE GREATEST
OVERALL INCREASES IN NUMERICAL GROWTH, FINANCIAL GROWTH AND
NEW MEMBERS ADDED. THIS YEAR THE AWARD GOES TO OUR **TWO**
RIVERS CHURCH AND PASTOR BOB SUGDEN CONGRATULATIONS PASTOR
BOB AND OUR TWO RIVERS CHURCH.**

**NOW I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE ALL OF OUR PASTORS STAND AND ASK OUR
PEOPLE TO GIVE THEM AN APPLAUSE OF THANKS FOR A JOB WELL DONE.**

NOW, LET'S REFUEL

I have three grand desires for our District this year. We must earnestly refuel our Vision in three areas. **FIRST AND FOREMOST WE NEED TO ONCE AGAIN**

1. **Become a HOLY PEOPLE**

WE NEED TO RETURN TO OUR ROOTS

I WOULD LIKE FOR OUR PASTORS, OUR LAITY, AND MYSELF TO REFUEL OUR VISION TO BE HOLY PEOPLE.

We all certainly realize that we are currently living in a culture of growing skepticism toward Christ's church in general, and in Christians in particular.

My friends, there is a way to reverse this skepticism.

In this age of constant information at the tip of our fingers, it seems our culture is saying, I don't need any more information about Christianity, **SHOW US YOUR TRANSFORMATION**. Our beautiful doctrine of Holiness seems to be simply more propaganda to them, unless and until, it becomes incarnate in the lives of a sacred counterculture people called the church. When our congregations display purity in morals, power in loving the marginalized and the unlovable, passion to be nothing more, or nothing less, than Christ-like people, then the Community around us will take notice. We need to show more than a grace that forgives the consequences of sin, we need to show a grace that demonstrates power and victory over sin's domination.

Our culture is longing to see a community of real hope, real holiness, real justice, real joy, real righteousness, real compassion, real passion and real belief that life is sacred and holy, eternal and valuable, rather than material and temporal. They are waiting to see people of stellar character, people filled with sanctified humor and fun, people for whom life is pure joy, then they will simply be driven to search for what makes us who we are.

Our society, and the church, is sick over all this talk of Christian priestly podfiles, Christian men addicted to pornography, Christian divorces, Sinning Saints. The world has seen enough of all that is base and vulgar they want to see genuine Holiness. There is

nothing more beautiful in this world, than Jesus Christ incarnate in our individual and corporate lives. What has always attracted the world to the church will still attract the world to the Church—**HOLY PEOPLE**. Christ's church has never been perfect, but it we can be pure. Christ died for his church to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing water of the word. He did this in order to present "HER TO HIMSELF AS A GLORIOUS CHURCH, WITHOUT SPOT OR WRINKLE, OR ANY OTHER BLEMISH. INSTEAD, SHE WILL BE HOLY AND WITHOUT FAULT IN HIS SIGHT."

It is time! Time to refuel our sanctified longings with the goal of seeing, "Holiness unto the Lord," become more than a theme song out of our past, but our marching orders into the future.

If I had my desire every pastor, and layman would go home with a new passion for Holiness, Actual Holiness not simply imputed Holiness but imparted Holiness.

LET'S RETURN TO OUR HOLINESS ROOTS.

2. Secondly, I wish for every pastor, every laymen, and myself to REFUEL OUR PASSION for PRAYER.

I probably am stating the obvious but my friends a lot of what we do is not necessary and a lot of what we don't do is necessary. Our current Christian culture does not honor spending time alone with God like we once did, but God honors it.

Am I wrong? We don't need another seminar, we don't need another three ringer binder, we don't need another 40 days of somebody else's program, until we've spent 40 days imploring God to send a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on his people. God can do more for a church in 40 minutes of Pentecostal visitation, than any 40 days of someone's program. We need to pray until He comes to visit us. We need to be subdued by the power and purity and plenitude of our mighty God. We must be on our knees asking God to map out His plans for us. I would like to call us to a year of sustained prayer. Any Church, and

Pastor who will take this **call to prayer** seriously, will come to next years Assembly noticeably and visibly different. Prayer is the way God is put on active duty.

LET'S RETURN TO OUR ROOTS.

3. Finally, I would like to call our pastors, our people and me back to our primary MISSIONAL PURPOSE. We must once again, make it our primary mission to win new people to Christ. Everything else pales in comparison to that calling. He came to seek and to save the lost. We must win people and make them Disciples of the Lord Jesus. As an old coach and athlete, I never played a game without the intention of winning. As a fisherman I always fish intentionally to catch fish. As a pastor I always preached for results. As a Christian minister I ministered to produce numerical and spiritual fruit. I never liked the song "Born to Lose," I prefer, "Victory in Jesus."

Jesus called us to be fishers of men. Now Dr. Jesse this is language we folks in Alaska understand. We know our fishing, and we take it seriously. We must return to the Great commission as the heartbeat and passion of our lives.

This may be antidotal, but in recent days I have been listening more intently, observing more earnestly, and perceiving with new eyes the people who share this world with me. The people for whom Christ died. What have I experienced? I've heard their hopelessness, I can see it in their vacuous eyes; I watch in empathy as they fill their lives with the husks of materialism, and as they engage in any experience that will take their minds off the emptiness in their lives. I ask you to open your eyes and your ears again. Listen to people's conversations in the stores where you shop. Observe the way they relate to each other, even to their own families. Often you can hear their despair, their anger, their lost-ness is almost palpable. Our communities desperately need Christ.

Nazarene people we need to refuel our Vision to win our family, friends, neighbors to Christ.

REFUEL OUR VISION AND RETURN TO OUR ROOTS:

RETURNING

- 1) TO HOLINESS**
- 2) TO PRAYER**
- 3) TO WINNING PEOPLE TO CHRIST**

LET'S DO IT!

And now...I WANT TO CLOSE BY EXPRESSING THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE:

All our **PASTORS** who serve Christ day by day without asking for anything but the opportunity to serve.

My capable District Advisory Board.

My District **Auxiliary Chairman:**

Andy Heer/SDMI Kathy Wigginton /NMI Mike Yost/NYI

My District Treasurer - Colleen Palmer

My District Secretary – Micky Boyer

Camp Maranatha Managers/ Board – Terry/ Becky Livengood

New Hope of the Last Frontier – Mark Risi, Staff & Board

All our **FAITHFUL LAITY** who travel the narrow way that leads to life, you are appreciated.

Forty-two years ago God gave me a great treasure, the one I love more than any other person became my wife. For me, no one can take her place. All I see in Linda is beauty. I think she is the most beautiful woman in the world. Her beauty is more than external, it's

in her character, her heart, her very woof and warp is to be Christ like. She's my girl and this year my office secretary. I must confess I've never had a secretary who bossed me around as much and to whom I submit so often. I'm one fortunate man, and why not, Christ has given to me and all of us every spiritual blessing in Christ. With that reality, I can attest that next year is going to be a good year and so is every year following!

Finally, forty-one years ago the most colossal event of my life occurred. I met Jesus. Since that instant I've never been the same and never wanted to be.

Respectfully, Michael R. Couch

(May 29, 2009)

