



North Fort Myers Church of the Nazarene Messenger

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Grace Greater than all Our Sin

General Superintendent emeritus, Jesse Middendorf shared a story some time ago that is worth remembering.

Several years ago, a friend of Dr. Middendorf's was flying to Israel and realized joining him on board the plane were many Jewish families making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. People of all ages were on the flight, eagerly anticipating this wonderful opportunity to visit their ancestral homeland, some for the first time. Once the plane reached its cruising altitude and the pilot turned off the "Fasten Seatbelt" sign, the passengers began to get up and move around. They greeted one another and shared stories about their families at home and how excited they were to have this opportunity to travel to Israel.

At some point, during this friendly exchange, a small child, three or four years old, began to anxiously make his way up the aisle, scrambling to make his way between and around the seemingly endless sea of legs, calling, "Abba! Abba!" It soon became obvious to everyone around him the boy had gotten separated from his father and was becoming increasingly frantic. Realizing the boy's need, an elderly rabbi stooped down and spoke comfortingly to him, "My dear child, as eager as you are to find your father, I am sure your father is even more anxious to find you. If you will allow me to lift you up, I'm sure you will hear your father calling your name." Having said that and seeing the clear approval of the toddler written in his face, the kind rabbi picked the child up in his arms and lifted him high enough so he could see above most of the heads in the aisle. Sure enough, the little boy soon heard his father calling his name and nearly jumped from the rabbi's arms into the loving arms of his father.

Dr. Middendorf's friend said he realized he had just witnessed the perfect analogy of prevenient grace. Prevenient grace is the idea that before I can have any knowledge of God he, through His mercy and grace, makes Himself known to me. In his book, The Pursuit of God, A W. Tozer writes:

"We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit. "No man can come to me," said our Lord, "except the Father which hath sent me draw him," and it is by this very prevenient drawing that God takes from us every vestige of credit for the act of coming. The impulse to pursue God originates with God, but the outworking of that impulse is our following hard after Him."

Simply stated, I love Him because He first loved me. Isn't that thought incredibly beautiful and precious? In our state of lost-ness and in the darkness of our wanderings, having no idea of God, He pursued us and made certain we knew of Him. He drew us from our hopelessness into His perfect plan, into His perfect love.

For those who have the mistaken notion that somehow our salvation must originate with us or that we can somehow take some measure of credit for the work of salvation, it is clear through our understanding of prevenient grace, that before our hearts had any clue we needed a clue – the plan of action was laid out, the Master and Creator was already waiting, already knocking, already pursuing, already loving us so much He provided the Arms into which we would fall before we were aware we needed to be caught.

In a world that appears to continuously go out of its way to deny the existence of their Heavenly Father, and for the Church that sometimes frets over the enormity of our task in the midst of that denial, I want to encourage us all to remember – that prevenient grace through which your loving Father pursued you is an ever-living, constantly flowing stream of eternal love and hope that reaches to the hardest heart and the most damaged soul, no matter how many times they ignore His voice. Our task in this seemingly un-savable world is not nearly as tough as we might think. Because our Heavenly Abba (Daddy) is still calling out the name of every single one of those lost little ones. Often, we simply need to be willing to lift them up high enough to hear.

Pastor Becky

March Church Calendar

- 1 – District Men’s Retreat & Cardboard Boat Regatta at LPCCC
- 2 – The Brown’s in Concert in A.M. Service Birthday/Anniversary Afterglow at the Parsonage
- 3 – LAMB’s Meeting (Sponsored by the Martha’s) Men’s Ministries Meeting
- 7 – Church Women of Lee County Luncheon for International Day of Prayer
- 12 – Board Meeting
LAMB’s Council Meeting
- 13-15 – Pastor Prep Days at LPCCC
- 15 – Healthy Living Expo
All-Church Bowling at Pin Street Lanes
- 22 – Block Party at the Parsonage
- 29 – District Ladies Day at Sebring Circle Theater

March Birthdays and Anniversaries

- 7 – Rosemary Rohrey
- 15 – Kitty Baxter
Glenn Young
- 19 – Betty West
- 20 – Mary Kisner
Tom & Julia Moore
Judy Rice
- 25 – Norma Gruber
Mary Clifford
- 28 – Gertrude Campbell
Gary Rice
- 30 – Marilyn Colter

Prayer Needs:

<i>Helen Beatty</i>	<i>Anna Marie Anderson</i>	<i>Dorothy Chapman</i>	<i>Denise Torvea</i>
<i>Amy Logsdon</i>	<i>Amber Beck</i>	<i>Eloise Garner</i>	<i>Bob & Betty Retter</i>
<i>Dick VanSkyver</i>	<i>Robin Sotomyer</i>	<i>Carole Brophy</i>	<i>Deanna Hager</i>
<i>Kenneth Fry</i>	<i>Karen Nacias</i>	<i>Sue Ann Skinner</i>	<i>Darlene Roach</i>
<i>Phyllis Obney</i>	<i>Rita Ruescher</i>	<i>Gertrude Campbell</i>	<i>Logan Vess</i>
<i>Jerry & Mary Kisner</i>	<i>Kitty Baxter</i>	<i>Marla Valasquez</i>	<i>Steve Woodby</i>
<i>Kristin Sanders</i>	<i>Robert Cissney</i>	<i>Mary Austin (ALS)</i>	<i>Russell Abrams</i>
<i>Mark & Debbie Woodby</i>	<i>Helen Beatty</i>	<i>The Ford Family (Larissa)</i>	<i>David Sanders</i>
<i>Jerry Werling</i>	<i>Dorrie Conrad</i>	<i>Janet Hamilton</i>	<i>Janet Andre</i>
<i>Sherry Billings</i>	<i>Betty Hillyard</i>	<i>Mary Clifford</i>	<i>Ida Chaplow John</i>
<i>& Marie Haddad</i>	<i>Irene Genesky</i>	<i>Julie Kaufmann</i>	<i>Joseph Groves</i>
<i>Paul Chaplow, Sr.</i>	<i>Pastor Mills</i>	<i>Betty Stewart</i>	<i>Rev. Oxenford</i>
<i>Our military, our leaders & our nation</i>			

LAMB’s Meeting

“Pot ‘O Gold”

Monday, March 3 - 6:30 P.M.

Hosted by our Martha’s

**Join us for a night of fun
and fellowship.**

An Irish meal will be served.

**(Please sign up in the foyer so we will
know how many to expect.)**

Sunday, March 16

Singles

**Going out to eat
after the morning service**

Men’s Ministries Meeting

Monday, March 3

6:30 P.M.

‘Smokin Pit’

Our church has an updated website. Just go to: www.northfortmyersnazarene.com. You will find the latest copy of *The Messenger*, our contact info, the latest news, pictures, email link and more. Check out the site and let us know what you think. We will be updating the site continuously. Your suggestions are welcome.

FIRST ANNUAL NFM WOMEN'S RETREAT



Our first annual Women's Retreat took place February 21 through 23, at Lake Placid Camp and Conference Center, and was a fun-filled, relaxing weekend. Our special speaker, Hydie Miller, encouraged us to embrace the power of God to transform our lives by sharing her personal testimony of how He has worked miraculous transformation in her own life. Hydie is the wife of Tony Miller, the senior pastor at First Church of the Nazarene Bradenton.

Everything from our time together with Hydie, praying for one another, the games, early morning walks, the trip to explore the murals, the visit to Highlands Hammock State Park and the CCC museum, sharing meals, the rainy bonfire and roasting marshmallows and the late-night talks, helped to bring us closer to one another and to the Lord.

Our goal is to make this a yearly event and eventually include every lady in our church. Make plans now to come along with us next year!

Annual Report of the Board of General Superintendents

Overland Park, Kansas

On Sunday evening, February 23, newly elected General Superintendent, Dr. David A. Busic delivered the annual Board of General Superintendents' Report during the 91st Session of the General Board. Dr. Busic's report, titled "For Such a Time as This," was enthusiastically received.

After bringing greetings from the Board to those attending, Dr. Busic gave a wonderful report from our 2013 General Assembly and noted among several firsts for the COTN last year, we reached our largest membership level in our history, with 2.3 million members, which is a 5% increase from 2012, with 20,816 organized churches worldwide (29,007 total) and a total of 156,441 new Nazarenes, representing a 9% increase, and comprising 461 districts, 53 educational institutions, and 191 compassionate ministry centers.

Dr. Busic stressed that missions remains central to all we do as a church, and reported the church's emphasis on missions and giving in support of missions is what makes it possible for the denomination to deploy 687 salaried missionaries and contracted volunteers worldwide. He added that this year, through Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, we reached our highest number of child sponsorships ever, with nearly 12,000. Two years after Syria erupted in civil war, we are working to keep children in school. Four Nazarene schools have taken in 300 children who will be supported by contributions from the church around the world. After Typhoon Yolanda devastated the Philippines in early December, the COTN helped greatly in the relief effort. The Philippines-Micronesia field strategy coordinator, Rev. Stephen Gualberto reported that despite the incredible devastation, "spirits remain high and Nazarene compassion is making a difference." If you would like to take a little peek inside where your NCM contributions go, check out the short video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4AjeHqdTJo>

The report culminated in Dr. Busic drawing a connection between Esther being advised by her Uncle Mordecai that perhaps she had risen to the position of queen "*for such a time as this*," in time to save her people – and the application for the Church that it is to our advantage as we reflect on the gains we have made as the Church, that we must also review where we are and where we are going. He highlighted the strengths of the Church as well as the challenges we face. Dr. Busic then shared what the Board believes to be our "strategic priorities," that is those characteristics that should help define who we are as Nazarenes. These are: *Meaningful Worship, Theological Coherence, Passionate Evangelism, Intentional Discipleship, Church Development, Transformational Leadership, and Purposeful Compassion.*

Dr. Busic's report concluded with these words: "We must expect great things *from* God ... and we must attempt great things *for* God. Jesus is Lord! Our hope is in Him! And so we continue to *make Christlike disciples in the nations.*" For a complete transcript of the report go to:

<http://nazarene.org/files/docs/General%20Board%20Report%202014%20Final.pdf>

What are YOU looking at?

As most of you know, we have a pair of bald eagles who have a nest and raise their young next door to our church. They have become very famous and now have their own web site, along with, not one, but two web cams, where anyone around the world can watch them 24-hours a day. It is very interesting, and I do watch them from time to time when I get the chance. Here in “snow bird” season, the crowds of eagle watchers at the church can become quite large because everyone wants to see these great birds as close-up as possible.

A few weeks back as I was walking to my car, I looked up and noticed one of the eagles perched on a branch on the dead pine tree in front of my car. It was only about 30 to 40 yards away, so I got out my binoculars and was able to get a very close and detailed look at this very large bird. I looked to my left to see if the crowd was also enjoying this amazing site, and to my amazement the entire crowd of eagle-watchers had all of their cameras and binoculars focused on the nest. I wondered why they were focusing there when there was nothing to see but the nest. The other eagle was not there and the baby was not yet old enough to even see its head sticking up. So, what were they looking at?

As I have observed the Christian community over the past 47 years (since I was 8). I have noticed we too have a habit of sometimes

turning our focus to the less important matters of life as well. Through the years we have allowed our focus to turn to legalized issues that have in many, if not most cases, sadly turned out to be the wrong measures by which to judge. The length of hair (on men and women), jewelry, clothes, too much make up or not enough, the way a person smells, their past, what they eat or drink, their denomination, etc. And yet we read in Luke 6:37 *Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.* And in Matthew 5:46: *If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?* Also, in Matthew 22:37-40, we read *Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* Sounds to me like Jesus was telling us to move our gaze off of the nest and onto the eagle. When we love others as Jesus loved we see so much more than just where and how people live (the nest) and move on to how we might help them in their daily lives.

I encourage all of us, let’s not get caught up looking in the wrong place. If we look where Jesus is calling us to look we can be part of a great movement of God as we work with Him to grow the Kingdom.

Grace and Peace, Pastor Van

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