

# NCM

MAGAZINE

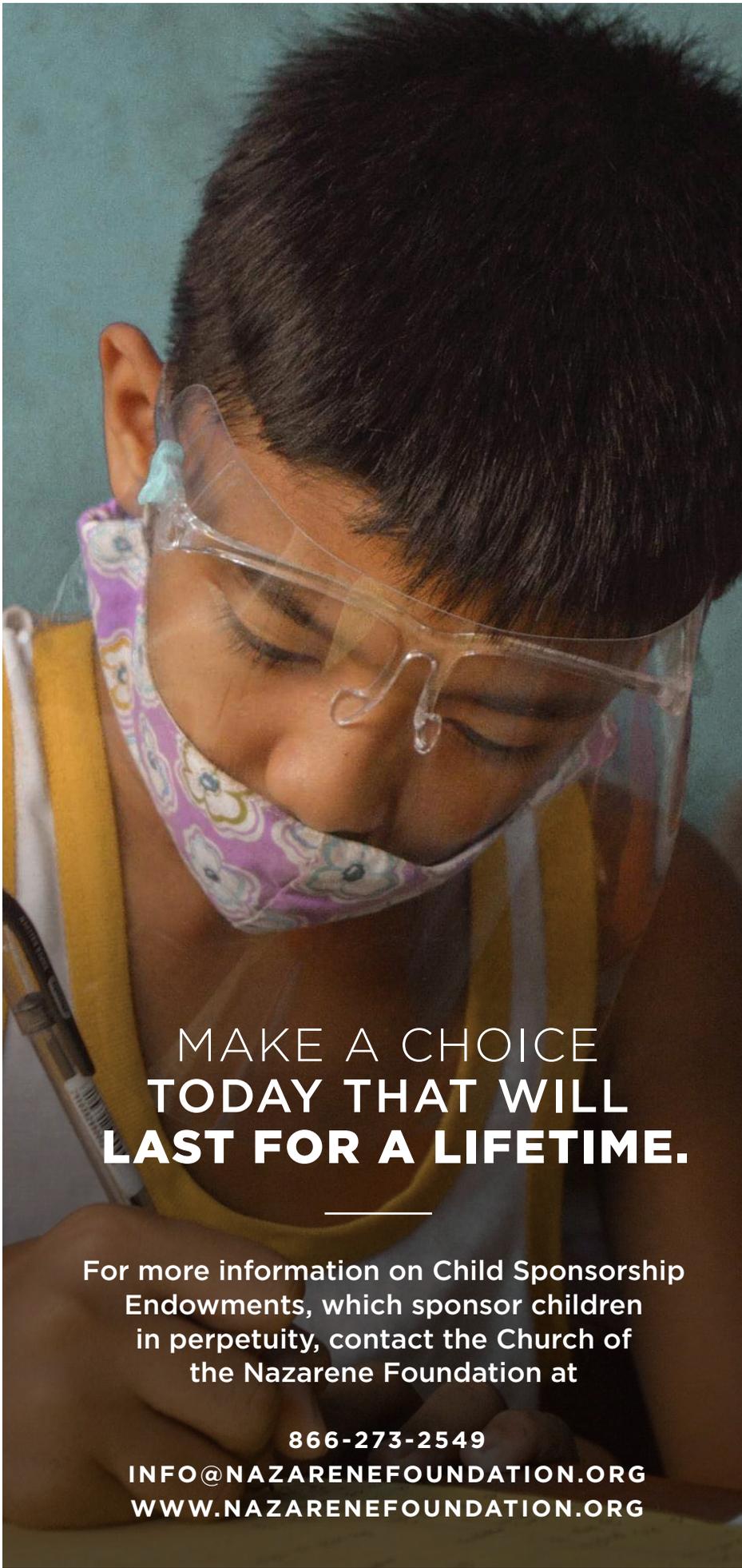


## Active Love in Lebanon

A shelter opens in Texas for survivors of human trafficking

How people are responding to a triple crisis

A history of compassion and justice in the Church of the Nazarene



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NCM Magazine aims to tell stories of the church living out Christ's compassion. Our hope is that all of us would hear the call to compassion as a lifestyle.



Following the example of Jesus, Nazarene Compassionate Ministries partners with local congregations around the world to clothe, shelter, feed, heal, educate, and live in solidarity with those who suffer under oppression, injustice, violence, poverty, hunger, and disease. NCM exists in and through the Church of the Nazarene to proclaim the gospel to all people in word and deed.

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# KEEP HOPE ALIVE!

By Nell Becker Sweeden

Dr. Tom Nees, who passed away earlier this year, was a prominent leader in the Church of the Nazarene in the USA/Canada Region. His life and ministry embodied a new way to live into God’s mission through the local church in urban areas and with specific attention to the voice and contributions of leaders of color. Upon his passing, I was invited to remember his legacy, particularly the impact he had on the creation of Nazarene Compassionate Ministries.

In a 1998 commencement address to graduating students of Nazarene Theological Seminary (NTS), Dr. Nees spoke to how holiness—in short, living a life of Christlikeness—and hope work hand-in-hand. He said, “The holiness message, with its radical hopefulness about the possibilities of personal and social change, remains at the heart of our life together.” He challenged the graduates to “Keep hope alive!” (Tom Nees NTS Commencement: May 17, 1998).

Over the past year and a half, I have witnessed Nazarene churches around the world in their tireless efforts to keep hope alive. Such hope is evident in the actions and response of the church in the face of crisis. Local members of congregations worldwide sprang into action to address immediate needs in their communities when storms, illness, and drought set in. They gathered resources to provide food, water, counsel, medicine, and educational tools. And, what is more, they creatively and faithfully delivered assistance when COVID-19 safety measures prevented daily work and limited travel and gathering. The actions of church members point to their motivation. What a deep hope in Christ we have.

And yet, for us to keep hope alive, it must be cultivated through long-term ministry and commitment. After all, what does it mean to walk alongside others in the midst of ongoing crisis?

In the sermon he gave only days following the September 11 attacks in the United States in 2001, Dr. Nees gave the students at NTS a charge, reminding them that ministry is presence: “It’s not having all the answers but leading frightened and fearful people on a faith journey together. It’s providing the comfort with which we are comforted. It is holding out faith as an option to despair. It’s singing ‘When all around my soul gives way—He then is all my hope and stay’” (Sermon at NTS Comfort and Explanation: Sept 21, 2001).

In these pages, you will read the stories from Lebanon, where people are living through crisis after crisis. When L. Assaad, a mother who was injured in the Beirut explosion, describes life as “... like a bridge of fire, and we have to cross it,” the hope of Christ in us responds. When Pastor Salameh in Beirut says, “Although we have no resources, we have nothing, but through the universal Body of Christ, we find out how much we are loved and how much people care for us,” it is by the hope of Christ that the global church responds.

May we too “keep hope alive!” May our lives point to the hope against all hope that is found only in Jesus. May we find strength in that we are not alone in our pursuit. We as the church are in this together—the church beyond borders—believing in the announcement of God’s reign that “everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor 5:17-18 NRSV).

Therefore, we must keep hope alive! ●

*But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.*

2 Cor. 4:7-9

## CONNECTION POINTS



PHOTOS BY NCM PHILIPPINES

*sponsorship spotlight*

# CHILD SPONSORSHIP DURING THE PANDEMIC

*The Nazarene Child Development Team, Philippines*



Child development is a big part of compassionate action for the Church of the Nazarene in the Philippines. The country has experienced one of the strictest COVID-19 lockdowns in the world, including restrictions on which family members can shop for groceries and what hours they're allowed to go out.

The challenge for the church was clear: How could it continue caring for children despite the pandemic? MJ, a Nazarene pastor who works with holistic child development, explains that the church wanted to continue providing holistic resources to children.

"God helped us to plan and prepare the things we need to do to reach every child and family in the community," he says.

First, the child development staff wanted to figure out how to provide educational and spiritual support remotely. So they created home-based Sunday school and vacation Bible school materials for parents and a support system to help them teach. One of the Bible school activities was the creation of a COVID garden. An area near one of the Nazarene churches was transformed from a garbage dump into a vegetable garden.

A learning hub has helped around 100 children who struggle to access distance learning systems, and child development staff have also been continually providing food packs, disinfection kits, face masks, vitamins, and other essentials to families.

The children who are part of the child development program have joined the ministry work as well. Jenny\*

was supposed to graduate in 2020. Instead, she found herself in lockdown with her siblings and grandparents. "I was sad, frustrated, and angry at first, asking God why He allowed these things to happen to His people," she explains.

Then she decided that nothing would stop her from worshipping God. She began to safely gather the children in her neighborhood to teach them Bible stories since they couldn't attend church. Jenny's family is also receiving monthly food packs from the Nazarene child development team, which she says is an answer to prayer.

"During the lockdown, we didn't even know where to get food. ... Little did I know, God is moving in God's own special way," Jenny says. ●

***"LITTLE DID I KNOW,  
GOD IS MOVING IN GOD'S  
OWN SPECIAL WAY."***

*\*Name is changed for protection.*



global focus

## HEALTHIER SOIL AND HIGHER YIELDS

Reporting and Photos by NCM Africa

Chisomo, 25, is in her second year of farming using conservation agriculture techniques. After the first year, she was so pleased with the results that she doubled the size of her plot from half an acre to a full one.

Through partnership, Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, Canadian Foodgrains Bank, and Growing Hope Globally have been teaching conservation agriculture techniques in Malawi, where Chisomo lives. The system allows for improved food production for small-scale farmers like Chisomo through minimal soil disturbance, organic soil cover, and crop diversification. The land stays fertile and farmers increase their long-term yields. So far, they've trained and resourced more than 1,000 farmers. As people learn that the project is affiliated with Nazarene churches, attendance grows as well.

After Chisomo harvests seeds from her field, she meticulously selects those that are good and carefully stores them

for the next planting season. In these small seeds, she says she sees a future where she and her family have regular access to enough nutritious food.

"I can struggle with food, but this is my future," she shares.

In Malawi, around 80 percent of the population lives as smallholder farmers—farmers of land less than five acres in size. Margret, a mother of four who was widowed, has a one-acre farm. She started using conservation agriculture techniques about a year ago. As the source of both food and income, the family's plot was cherished. Changing to a new method wasn't without risk, but Margret decided to do it after seeing her friend's higher yields.

"Doing conservation agriculture was a gamble because it's my first time to do it," Margret explains. "Today I am a happy farmer because the same land that was giving me two ox carts [of crops] has given me four. I look forward to growing next season." ●

### WHY FOOD SECURITY INSTEAD OF HUNGER RELIEF?

The answer is all in the definition. Food security means that people have physical, social, and economic access to enough safe, nutritious food. In other words, it's being able to live both without hunger itself *and* without the fear of hunger.

Many of the food security programs Nazarene Compassionate Ministries supports also establish savings groups. These groups provide a secure way to plan for the future; participants can securely save as well as take out small loans to expand their fields, purchase seeds, or start small businesses. Thus, projects that address access to food and economic stability are sustainable in more ways than one.



# COMPASSION — THROUGH — NEIGHBORLINESS

## *everyday compassion*

The Bible is full of references to loving your neighbor. Just look at 1 Corinthians 10:24: “Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.” This is a time when neighborly love—the simple, respectful love that we can share as children of God—is needed more than ever as the whole world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 1 START BY LISTENING.

Who are your neighbors? Following the current health and safety guidelines, start conversations to get to know them. As you become better connected in your neighborhood, you may also see ways you can care for people. Offer to bring a meal to the person who lives alone or write a note to the family around the corner.

### 2 NOW EXPAND YOUR PERSPECTIVE.

Think about your neighbors in a broader sense; who shares your city or town? Perhaps your community has a high population of those living as refugees. Maybe there are people struggling to break free of poverty near you. Find organizations that address these matters online or check with a well-connected church. Ask how you can be of service.

### 3 MAKE A PRAYER SCHEDULE.

Jot down a list of a few neighbors—those physically around you and those in Christ—who are in need. Then create a schedule to pray for them. Pick a specific day of the week or set an alarm to pray through Scriptures about loving your neighbor. As you pray, you may find God changing your perspectives.

# PREPARING FOR THE PREDICTABLE

NAZARENE DISASTER RESPONSE TEAMS SERVE DURING U.S. DISASTERS

By Brandon Sipes

Photos by K. Ray McDowell and Darin Pound

**A**cross the United States, the summer months of June through August are marked by familiar annual routines. Summer vacation begins for most school-aged children. Families take vacations and road trips. The Memorial Day holiday leads to Fourth of July celebrations, and all across the country, the warmer weather invites people outside.

For those who live along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts in the south of the country, the summer is marked by another reliable series of events. Those who live in these states anxiously monitor the weather predictions during hurricane season—June through November—to watch how these storms develop and to pray that they do not make landfall. With certainty each year, hurricanes will develop somewhere out in the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, or the Gulf of Mexico.

**“IT’S NOT IF.  
IT’S WHEN.”**

Pastor Darin Pound, a Nazarene pastor in Texas, lived in Florida for years. Having served in two disaster-prone areas, he understands what pastors and other disaster survivors often need.

“It’s not if,” he says. “It’s when.”

## THE CHURCH’S ROLE

While these yearly storms are predictable, their frequency and intensity are increasing. Last year’s hurricane season was the most active and fifth costliest on record. Warmer ocean waters and higher sea levels due to climate change mean that storms will more rapidly intensify, and storm surges will have more significant damage. Additionally, warmer waters mean increased rain from these storms. Since it is the flooding that is the most lethal aspect of a hurricane, these storms are poised to be deadlier each year.

Recognizing this increased unpredictability and danger, the Church of the Nazarene encourages and equips local churches to be as prepared as possible and to seek out those in need after a disaster.

The church has a role to play in reducing the risk of disasters in our communities by preparing for an efficient and helpful response, supporting long-term recovery, and advocating for policies that would reduce the risk from disasters for the most vulnerable. And while this article discusses hurricane response in the U.S., it is relevant globally as well. Nazarenes are responding to disasters all over the world.

## RESPONDING IN LOUISIANA

For those living in Louisiana, 2020 was a particularly difficult hurricane season. The state found itself in the forecast track for seven different tropical

storms or hurricanes, five of which made landfall somewhere along its coast. The most devastating of these was Hurricane Laura, a major Category 4 storm that made landfall in Cameron and then made its way north to the city of Lake Charles and beyond. The storm caused massive damage across the state, and its effects were felt all the way to North and South Carolina, about 1,000 miles away. In and around Lake Charles, one of the hardest-hit areas, the power grid went down, thousands of homes and buildings were destroyed, and 33 people were killed across the state.

The pastor of Lake Charles First Church of the Nazarene found himself in the difficult position of having a church building with significant wind and water damage, as well as suffering damage to his home. In the midst of this, he was receiving calls from congregation members who also had damage to their homes and were in need of food, water, and other supplies. This is a typical struggle for our pastors and leaders: balancing their own needs with serving others in the midst of a disaster. Disaster survivors often include the “helpers” themselves, and

***“IN EVERY SITUATION, THERE ARE ALWAYS PEOPLE WHO ARE JUST OVERWHELMED.”***

so what is desperately needed during these times is external support.

Across the districts of the United States, there are numerous Nazarene Disaster Response (NDR) teams that fulfill this role. From spiritual care and counseling teams based in Reno, Nevada, to teams equipped with disaster response trailers engaged in chainsaw work and flood remediation, Nazarene lay people and pastors are already prepared to serve after a disaster has occurred.

During the months after Hurricane Laura, in Lake Charles and nearby cities, scores of Nazarene volunteers arrived and worked alongside those



Disasters are becoming more common. In the U.S., Nazarene Disaster Response teams can help.



Nazarene Disaster Response teams are focusing on preparation so they can respond when disasters hit.





Teams of volunteers provide supplies and repair damage.

affected by the storm. These volunteers tarped roofs, removed moldy drywall, cleared properties of storm debris, and piled it on the roadside for collection. Electrical work and other light construction followed.

### MOBILIZING LOCAL CHURCHES

In addition to his pastoral work, Pound coordinates the NDR team for the South Texas District. He and several others from the district made the trip to Louisiana early on to assess damage and then returned to assist in the work, bringing crisis care kits—packets of essentials gathered by churches across the U.S.—along with other needed supplies and tools.

“In every situation, there are always people who are just overwhelmed,” Pound shares. “And when someone cares enough or a team comes in that just helps them carry their burden, it’s just a real sense of relief.”

Pound also recognizes the need to mobilize the local churches to respond in their own affected communities, particularly for the most vulnerable.

“Our goal in helping the members of the church is ... the whole mentality of equipping the saints for the works of service,” he explains.

At the time of Pound’s interview, Texas was in the midst of record-breaking snow storms that left millions of people without power. In fact, he had to reschedule the conversation because he was out towing cars out of the snow.

“I guess until you’ve lived in those areas ... that deal with these types of things, it’s easy to be removed,” he says. “You know, it’s easy for me to be removed from snow storms until they come to Texas.”

The South Texas team and several others have intentionally increased their level of preparation in order to respond more fully during disasters. Response teams in district after district have attended trainings, equipped disaster response trailers, formalized team personnel and communications across districts, and collected supplies to have at the ready. This allows not only for rapid and efficient response immediately after



As disasters become more common, preparation will become even more important.

disaster strikes, but also for long-term engagement in our communities as well.

Wayne Cheselka, an NDR director in South Carolina, has been taking teams to Florida for more than two years in response to Hurricane Michael in 2018. Their work continues to show the long-term commitment that the Church of the Nazarene has to communities that are wrestling to get back on their feet.

### REBUILDING AND PREPARING

Others respond to hurricanes in the United States as well, including Nazarene Work & Witness teams. Brian Jay, who lives in Ohio, says that God called him to join one of the teams traveling down from his area. His team helped clean and rebuild just weeks after the hurricanes.

“It was the first hurricane I’d been to, so the fact that every single house or business was gutted and everything was out front at the street ... that to me was an incredible sight,” he says.

Jay points to an experience just weeks after Lake Charles was hit by Hurricane Laura and then Hurricane Delta, which arrived a few weeks later. Despite the surrounding destruction, one of the Nazarene churches was able to gather safely on a Sunday morning to worship together.

“What a joyful Sunday service that was,” Jay says.

Back in Lake Charles, the recovery will continue as well, with district leaders coordinating arriving teams and connecting them with churches and families in need. Roofs are being replaced, and homes rebuilt. Nazarene churches are replacing sound systems and hymnals, pews and Bibles. And all this in the midst of another hurricane season approaching.

Let us both pray for a quiet season and do our best to prepare ourselves for its impact. ●

*To learn more about Nazarene disaster response, visit [ncm.org/emergencyrelief](http://ncm.org/emergencyrelief) or watch “The Church’s Response to Disasters” on the NCM YouTube page.*

# LEBANON

The **292-MILE** Lebanon Mountain Trail crosses the country border to border. Along the way, it passes ancient cedar forests, Roman temples, monasteries carved into cliff faces, and many natural wonders.

The Nazarene church has been active in Lebanon **SINCE THE 1920s**, and the first formal meetings of Nazarenes began around 1948.

Lebanon is home to some of the oldest cities in the world, including the coastal city of Byblos, or Jbeil in Arabic. The city has been continuously inhabited for more than **5,000 YEARS**. *Byblos* comes from the early Greek name for *papyrus*, which is also the source of the word *Bible*.

Ouadi Qadisha (the Holy Valley) is the site of one of the first Christian monastic settlements. Nearby is one of the last groves of the famed cedar forests of Lebanon, home to trees that can live as long as **1,000 YEARS** or more.

*Facts come from Britannica, National Geographic, and UNESCO.*

To read about a ministry in Lebanon, turn to page 12.

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of compassion!

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# A TRIPLE CRISIS

RESPONDING WITH COMPASSION IN LEBANON

*By Shannon Barr*

*Photos Courtesy of NCM Lebanon*

**A**ndrew Salameh, pastor of a Nazarene church in Lebanon, has seen firsthand how God has lifted and helped the team at his church minister to people.

“Every few years you have a new war, or a new crisis, or a new problem,” Salameh says. “Really, it’s not easy to live in a country like that. We need people who are really called for such a time as this and for such a ministry like this.”

Along with the rest of the globe, Lebanon has been coping with the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic fallout. Add to that an ongoing economic crisis and a major explosion, and you have a glimpse into what current conditions are like for people living in and near Lebanon’s capital, Beirut.

After the explosion, the local churches jumped to action to care for the whole community.



The Nazarene school in Lebanon has been serving students for more than 50 years.

The church Salameh pastors is heavily involved in the community, offering programs to meet people’s various needs, including educational programs, counseling services, meals, and clothes. In partnership with the church is a Nazarene school, founded in 1966, which provides the community more than education alone.

“In addition to the education, they work on the inner being of their students,” says A. Sader.

Sader’s husband and his siblings were students at the school 25 years ago, and now her daughter attends the school. Like many in Lebanon, Sader’s family was deeply affected by the economic crisis and the pandemic. First, Sader lost her job during the economic crisis. A few months later, her husband’s job as a barber was made nearly impossible by the pandemic. The school became a place of stability and comfort.

“If the student is struggling, they care for [his or her] psychological state,” she explains. “They like to build up the kids on all levels—emotionally, physically, educationally.”

**“THEY WORK ON THE INNER BEING OF THEIR STUDENTS.”**

**A COMMUNITY CHURCH**

In the midst of a triple crisis, the church and school’s numerous community programs have become even more important. In part, this is because of the holistic nature of both the church and the school, which go beyond providing services. They are well known in the community because they are part of the community.

The church distributes about 1,000 food packages around the community each month to both Lebanese and Syrians living in Lebanon as refugees—a number that has doubled in the time during the pandemic and after the Beirut explosion. The devastating detonation

of ammonium nitrate occurred on August 4, 2020, and resulted in about 200 deaths, an estimated 6,000 injuries, and widespread damage to buildings and homes. The whole city experienced the trauma of it.

“We were already tired and the blast knocked us down,” says R. Awad.

Awad’s children are the second generation to attend the school; she and her siblings were also students there. She likes it not only because the education is very good

but also because they treat her children like family. She says that her relatives were surprised that the school even helped repair the family’s home.

The explosion left about 300,000 people without homes. Around 50 percent of students at the school had damage to their houses. Overall, the church helped fix at least 170 homes. The church and school buildings were also affected—glass windows were shattered and the ceiling was destroyed. In fact, the lockdown became a blessing in disguise; had it not been in place, students and congregants would have been in both buildings during the explosion.

“After the explosion, for a few days I was in shock and was not able to do anything,” Salameh shares. “For three, four, five days I was just getting some phone calls, but I was not able even to think.”

Still, volunteers were at the school building and the church the very next day to clean debris. The church staff and members knew they needed a plan. Salameh says they began prioritizing the needs: finding shelter for those with damaged homes, distributing food and medication, providing counseling, and maintaining educational programs for students. Then, once they identified the needs, they got to work to meet them.



In a remarkable show of faith, global followers of Christ responded to the needs that arose. The church received donations from different groups, churches, individuals, and organizations locally and around the globe, including Nazarene Compassionate Ministries.

“You know, really this is the first time that I [knew] how much we are connected as a Body of Christ,” Salameh says. “We are blessed that the Lord is providing for us all these resources to help people.”

It was clear that providing care for mental health and wellness needed to be part of the long-term recovery. To help support people’s mental wellness after that traumatic event, the church opened the Balassan Counseling and Medical Center. Located minutes away from the church building, the center largely focuses on counseling. The center’s staff includes a psychiatrist, psychologist, medical doctor, physiotherapist, and orthophonist (also referred to as a speech-language pathologist or therapist).

Since June 2014, the church has served meals to those who are elderly or experiencing illness through their Agape Table program. It provides three meals a week for about 40 people, distributing the food door to door. And when the pandemic hit, the ministry provided meals up to five times per week to those in need. Agape Table also sells food and pastries to support the program through a shop run by six workers as well as volunteers. The church also established the Mustard Seed Mini Market, providing people vouchers to get canned and dry goods.

“Because we live in the community ... people have a good image about the church, and they talk about us in a good way,” Salameh shares. “So that helps us a lot to keep going. ... We are blessed that the Lord is providing for us all these resources to help people.”

According to the United Nations, Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita, including those from Syria, Sudan, Palestine, Iraq, and other nations of origin. During the early days of the Syrian refugee crisis, the church’s Karibe Project was created. Now, Karibe provides blankets, clothes, and shoes for free to anyone in need. A section of the shop also sells items at a low price.

## DIFFERENT EVERY TIME

Marlene Mshantaf, the principal of the Nazarene school and the NCM coordinator in Lebanon, was a teacher during the Lebanese civil war that began in 1975. When she was a teacher at the school during the war, Marlene and several of her colleagues once sheltered in the school building with some of the students for three days without any food or supplies.

“With a civil war in Lebanon, we had to deal with death, we had to deal with losing kids, losing parents, and losing teachers,” Mshantaf explains.

That doesn’t make the current crises any easier. The young people in the country had never experienced anything like this explosion. And those who lived through the war are facing the trauma they’ve already lived through.

“But every time it’s different, you know,” she says. “That was the first time that [the young people saw] all this destruction. They’ve seen this death in front of them.”

Mshantaf explains that many of the children are still traumatized and run away from the windows

**“THIS IS THE FIRST TIME  
THAT I [KNEW] HOW MUCH  
WE ARE CONNECTED AS  
A BODY OF CHRIST.”**

when they hear loud noises. The parents and children who are a part of the school were also able to receive counseling at Balassan. The school itself also works with a psychologist, who works with children remotely whenever they need support.

“Many times, I needed to talk about my struggles with my kids and [couldn’t] find anyone to talk to,” says Awad, the mother who also attended the school herself. “The school provided the right staff for me.”

That emotional support had a big impact on Awad. That’s part of the holistic ministry—the school staff chose to provide above and beyond because God called them to do so. Another mother, L. Assaad, was in her apartment when it was decimated by the explosion. She and her son, a 12-year-old who attends the Nazarene school, were both badly injured by the glass and debris.

“It has created strong psychological problems for children,” Assaad says. “They need someone to stand by them in any way possible so that they can move beyond this horrid memory and go on with their lives in a healthy way.”

The school helped find medical care for Assaad

The Nazarene school and local churches are figuring out how to continue ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The school offers classes for students from Lebanon and for students living as refugees who have missed years of school.



and her son in the immediate aftermath of the explosion. Because their apartment was unlivable, the school also helped find shelter for the family and coordinate the extensive repairs to their home.

“The Nazarene school and its church embraced us with their tenderness and faith after my son and I were terribly affected by Beirut’s explosion,” she continues. “Without my son’s school and the Nazarene church, I do not think we would have been able to endure.”

### THE NAZARENE SCHOOL

The school is split into two sections: a formal education in the morning that is part of the Lebanese educational system and informal classes in the afternoon for Syrian refugee students who have missed years of schooling while in transit. Around 255 students come in the morning and 100 attend in the afternoon.

After the economic crisis that began in October 2019, many families were already struggling to afford food or basic medicine—let alone education. Then came the pandemic, which cut work hours, and the explosion, which destroyed businesses and shops.

To Mshantaf, it’s more important that the students are able to stay in school. The students agree, and so do the teachers. Throughout the economic crisis, the lockdown, and the explosion, the school has found a way to continue providing education. This has increased the burden on the school; Mshantaf wanted to make sure the teachers’ salaries were paid.

“They did not stop teaching, not any day,” Mshantaf says.

Through donations and sponsorships from all over the world, they’ve been able to offer scholarships to some of the families in need, which keeps the school running as well. Parents of both refugee and Lebanese students have expressed deep gratitude when they were offered scholarships that allowed them to keep their children in school.

“As parents, the school was extremely thoughtful with us,” Sader says. “They never pressured us to pay the tuition, especially after the blast and during the economic crisis. It was overwhelming and touching.”

Before the pandemic—when students met in person—the staff ensured that children who didn’t have lunch received a sandwich. The church also distributed food coupons or food packages to families in need.

During the mandated lockdown, the school shifted to hosting virtual classrooms. Through the e-school program, teachers used online messaging and videos to teach live classes and distribute and receive homework. The internet costs are expensive in Lebanon, which caused some problems for students. Though they couldn’t afford to pay everyone’s internet costs, the school and NCM partnered to provide tablets for each student.

### CULTIVATING RECONCILIATION

Even before the current crises, the school also hosted reconciliation groups. In part, this was in reaction to the influx of refugee students. For two years, they hosted experts to share lectures and run small group sessions. They have even continued virtually during pandemic lockdowns.

“We started training our teachers and our students to know that they’re all leaders and we can continue working together,” Mshantaf says.

It’s worth mentioning that the school and the church both are extremely proactive when it comes to equipping themselves to address trauma. After a traumatic event during a church service, many leaders from both entities participated in courses and training to become lay counselors. This has proved to be important in the current situation.

“I don’t know [how] to describe our situation,” Mshantaf shares. “I don’t know what to describe.”

Assaad, the mother who was injured in the explosion, paints a more descriptive picture:

“If I have to describe my life now I would say, it is like a bridge of fire, and we have to cross it,” she says.

Just as the church and the school have ministered to the community, so have the followers of Christ ministered to the church and the school. Mshantaf and Salameh are both quick to point out that this Body of Christ made their work possible. Becoming the hands and feet of Christ became a global response.

“Although we have no resources, we have nothing, but through the universal Body of Christ, we find out how much we are loved and how much people care for us,” Salameh says. ●



One important part of the local church’s ministry is health care, including mental health support.



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### **MILLIE, AGE 10, LOVES TO PLAY THE PIANO.**

Right now, she lives in Russia with her parents and her brother, and she likes to attend her local child development program, where she can learn and listen to music. For children living in poverty like Millie, the last year has been struggle after struggle.

You can sponsor Millie today for just \$30 a month, giving her the gift of nutritious meals, quality education, long-term life skills, and a deep understanding of God's love.

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# A PLACE OF REST

PROVIDING SAFE SPACES TO  
SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

*By Amanda Pettit*

*Photos Courtesy of Amanda and Steven Pettit*

**I** noticed Kaley\* as I drove past her on my way to the veterinarian's office with my dog. She appeared to be hiding in the tall bushes lining the road and was looking around frantically. It was a surprising thing to see, even in East Fort Worth, where I live.

Typically, I tell people that the best thing to do if you see someone you think might be in trouble is to pull over and call the authorities without letting the person out of your sight. In cases of human trafficking, it's best to leave the interventions to trained professionals. But something told me I had to stop when I saw Kaley. When I rolled down the window, she asked to get in the car right away.

An estimated 313,000 victims of human trafficking live in Texas at any given time, with 400 teens being sold each night in the Dallas-Fort Worth area alone. Kaley was—and perhaps still is—one of those 313,000.

## **PLANTING SEEDS**

I spent four hours with Kaley that day. The anti-human trafficking organization I volunteered with advocated for those who had been trafficked, and we arranged for an advocate to meet with Kaley and take her to a shelter. But within two days, she was already gone. While the shelters for those who are homeless are extremely helpful, they are sometimes not the best place for someone who needs trauma-informed care. Recently rescued survivors of human trafficking can be vulnerable to force, fraud, or coercion.

Out of this experience came the seed for the idea of Rescue Hill. Now a compassionate ministry center, Rescue Hill was created out of the need for a place of safety—and hope—in the midst of crises. Resources for escaping trafficking are also available. Since there are many other organizations who were already providing wrap-around services, we are able to partner with them to join survivors of trafficking seeking long-term solutions.

I don't know where Kaley is today, but I haven't forgotten her. God used her to plant something in my heart and open my eyes to the need for emergency beds, reserved solely for those who have been trafficked. In the Dallas-Fort Worth area, 22 nonprofit or faith-based organizations are devoted to anti-human trafficking, but none of them had emergency beds. We believe it's imperative to have a safe and secure place for survivors to rest and receive resources.

## **ADVOCACY AND TRANSFORMATION**

Trained advocates at Rescue Hill also provide resources via multiple networks. We work closely with law enforcement, community leaders, and the other organizations to connect survivors with the care they need, when they need it. Advocates are trained to offer resources in conjunction with law enforcement and are available for training and consulting.

Those trafficked for labor also make up a large percentage of the statistics in Texas. Rescue Hill sits

in Arlington, Texas, directly between Dallas and Fort Worth. Recently, we learned that just 17 miles south of us there were 23 individuals from Central America working off a debt in the kitchen of a local restaurant. Without affordable immigration assistance, they didn't feel they had any other option.

Traffickers prey on vulnerabilities. Those vulnerabilities can have many different causes, including an unstable immigration status. Rescue

***“I DON'T KNOW WHERE KALEY IS TODAY, BUT I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN HER.”***

Hill is in the process of becoming an immigration center, recognized by the Department of Justice, which will enable us to provide affordable,

accredited immigration services to the most vulnerable in our community.

The Rescue Hill building also hosts three different churches. Usually, a church has a compassionate ministry, but Rescue Hill is a compassionate ministry with churches. The building we renovated was given to us by a congregation called Arlington CristoJesus Vive, which continues to meet there. Many people, including our district superintendent, had been praying for a building. Those prayers were answered the night we met people from Arlington CristoJesus Vive and they told us, *We want you to have our building. But we want you to take us along.* And we have done just that.

In addition to Arlington CristoJesus Vive, we also have a congregation of those living as refugees from Myanmar. The third congregation is an English-speaking church my husband, Steve, and I planted. Each congregation is a part of the work at Rescue Hill; our heart and vision are to have a place for those we serve to worship and experience the transformative love of Christ. ●

*Rev. Amanda Pettit serves as the co-director at Rescue Hill Compassionate Ministry Center with her husband, Rev. Steve. The Pettits also served as missionaries for the Church of the Nazarene for many years.*

*\*Name is changed for protection.*

## A PERVASIVE CRIME

Human trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar industry that enslaves men, women, and children in every world area, in every country. It is a crime that involves people from all walks of life as both perpetrators and victims. It is estimated that more than 40 million people are being trafficked each year, which is more than the entire population of Texas.

Traffickers use tactics like violence, manipulation, coercion, and false promises to attract and entrap people who are in vulnerable positions. The reality is that the economic instability, lockdowns, and lessening of resources caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have created more vulnerabilities, and instances of human trafficking are growing as a result.

To learn more and get involved, visit:

[ncm.org/antitrafficking](https://ncm.org/antitrafficking)

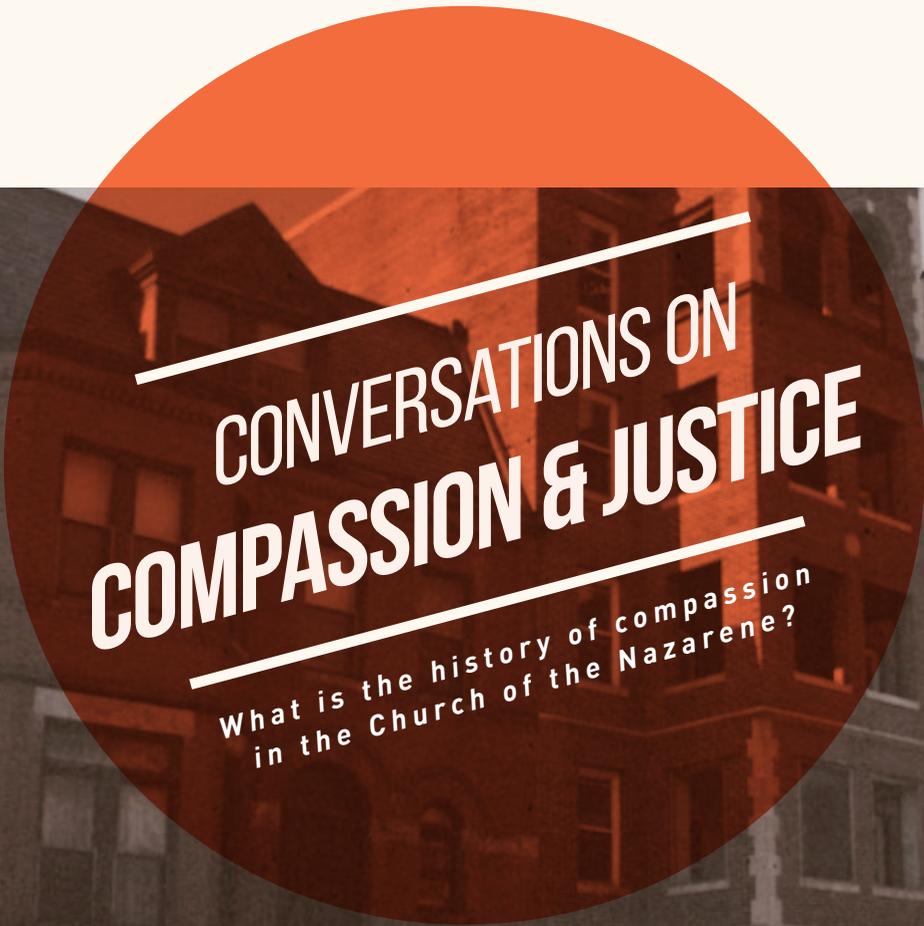
[polarisproject.org](https://polarisproject.org)

[state.gov/20-ways-you-can-help-fight-human-trafficking](https://state.gov/20-ways-you-can-help-fight-human-trafficking)

LOVE *Liberates*



RESCUE HILL PROVIDES A SAFE SHELTER FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN TRAFFICKED.



# CONVERSATIONS ON COMPASSION & JUSTICE

What is the history of compassion  
in the Church of the Nazarene?

Community of Hope in Washington, D.C., USA,  
became a model for urban ministry and justice.

*Photos Courtesy of the Nazarene Archives*

**A**t the request of Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, Ron Benefiel sat down to facilitate a conversation with Althea Taylor and Sam Vassel about the history of compassion and justice in the Church of the Nazarene and the impact of Tom Nees. Both Taylor and Vassel have spent their careers and pastoral vocations emphasizing compassion and justice in ministry and worked closely with Tom Nees, who had a deep impact on each of them.



**Ron Benefiel:** Althea, let's start with something you once said, that ... "the church is a reflection of God's love in the world." Talk about what that might have to do with compassion and compassionate ministry.

**Althea Taylor:** Well, one of my favorite passages in Scripture—and I think it relates to that—comes out of Philippians chapter two, which highlights that Christ's coming—I believe—was an act of compassion. [This chapter] talks about how Jesus willingly clothed Himself in humanity and denied His deity. He had all rights to assume full deity but denied the full breadth of all that God is. That is an act of compassion.

And in John 17, near the end of Jesus' ministry ... He prays for the disciples and then He prays for those of us who will come to faith having heard what the disciples have said and have taught. He said, *I'm not praying that you take them out of the world but that you keep them so that they will be able to demonstrate to the world that I am in you and you are in me.*

The church is God's compassionate touch on the world where He has left His presence. And the presence of God has been through those who He gave His spirit to, which is the church. And the church is called to be a witness to the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit that guides us.

**Benefiel:** So, Sam, over to you. Compassion and justice. And I would think for you, you might want to start talking about justice here. It's something that we're supposed to do because we're Christian, but for you, it seems like it's more of a passion. Why are you passionate about this?

**Sam Vassel:** Well, you know, I had the good fortune—the grace—to be born to holiness preachers. Both my mother and father were ordained ministers. They embodied a form of the tradition of the faith that had a seamless relationship between the inner transformation—that is the emphasis of the holiness movement—and compassionate engagement with people. My father was bi-vocational, for instance. In Jamaica, we have a whole government department called the poor relief department. And my father was the local "Inspector of Poor." How fortunate! He is paid by the government to be the Inspector of Poor, and he's also the holiness preacher in town.

When I became a Nazarene, I was told by the district superintendent here that I had to know what the [Nazarene *Manual*] said, and I had to know what Timothy Smith's book *Called Unto Holiness* said. You know, Timothy Smith is this historian that really showed the relationship between inner transformation and compassionate engagement; his portrait of the Church of the Nazarene and its beginning was one I had to know. And when I read it, I said, *this is my home.*

*[Vassel here refers to the origins of the Church of the Nazarene as a people who lived out their protest to social patterns through their life choices as well as through the ministries of early Nazarene churches, which were often founded in the midst of areas marked by poverty and struggle.]*

**Benefiel:** Althea, with your former role as director of compassionate ministries for the U.S. and Canada—you had a view of what was happening [in the whole country]. As a denomination, we were very committed to issues of compassion and justice—the difference maybe being that compassion is caring for those in need and justice challenges the systems that continue to oppress people. Could you comment on that?

**Taylor:** There was this manifestation of where the church folk, [not just Nazarenes], were in the world, but not of the world. And I get that Scripture, but your call is to be in the world—to be a light in the world so that people can see who Christ is. And it's more than just [a spiritual relationship], because people wrestle with their spirituality and their relationship with God through the things that they are experiencing in the world and the hardships and the wonderful-ships—all the “ships” that happen. The fellowships and everything that happens as you live your life.

[Incarnational ministry] is what I believe the church is called to be because that's what Jesus wants for the world. He dwelt amongst us. He came and He lived and He walked where people walked; He felt what people felt.

And so when I listened to Tom and when I heard Tom speak about [starting] the Community of Hope clinic, [which came out of seeing those

who didn't] have access to quality dignified health care. What do we do? Let's open a hospital. Let's open a place that in the midst of the AIDS pandemic is a place here where people who are poor and don't have health care can go. ... The church is called to be a voice crying out saying, *This [not caring for each other] is not pleasing to God.* And God came to turn the standards [in the church], to flip it on its head and say, *The spirit of the Lord is upon me and has given me charge to bring good news.*

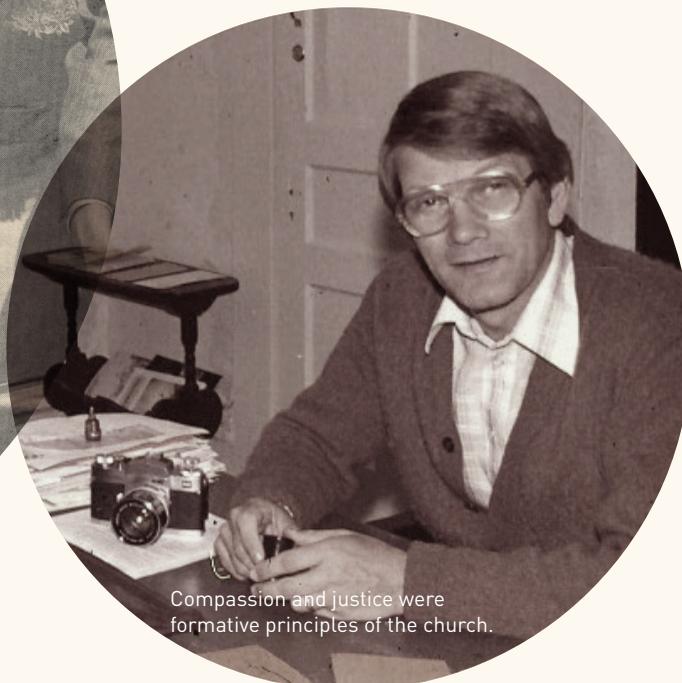
I think Tom was a reflection of the same thing, [the grappling of the church with its identity], that happened for him. I think we're in that space again, that we're wrestling with: *What does it mean to be the church?* And I think we have the template already; it's what we know as the Wesleyan quadrilateral, [Scripture, tradition, experience, and reasoning]. That's what the church is built on.

**Vassel:** The analysis of Jesus was that He is a friend of sinners. And that's a problem because there are some things that we know are sins and ... we don't always want to identify with those who do those things. Bresee and those guys who started the Church of the Nazarene apparently were not afraid to be identified with [people written off as sinners].

I want us to know that Tom Nees, to the point of his death, took the risk to be aligned with the Kingdom by identifying with people others may view as outcasts.



Nees helped bring compassion and justice together, asking necessary questions.



Compassion and justice were formative principles of the church.



## HOW TOM NEES SHAPED NCM

If you begin to trace back modern compassionate ministries in the Church of the Nazarene, you'll eventually get to Tom Nees. Through the many roles he served in the church, Nees helped radically reshape the story of both compassion and justice in the church. In 1975, he founded what has now become Community of Hope in Washington, D.C., as a Church of the Nazarene. There, the church became a part of the community rather than an outside entity, creating a model for urban ministry that is still widely used.

Nees didn't just talk about compassion and justice in the Kingdom of God; he lived it. Perhaps the best way to explain Nees' formational way of life and thought is through his own words to NCM back in 1998:

"I've never thought of compassionate ministries as being outside the central focus or central mission of the church. It's not a tangent. It's not something you add on and do if you have time. It's right at the heart of everything we do. ...

"We need to get back to our roots and to understand holiness as optimism about the possibilities for personal and social change, and to realize that holiness as we understand it was developed by [John] Wesley, [founder of the Methodist movement], in the midst of an urban ministry to the poor. ...

"We are living in troubling times. The trends look so foreboding that a lot of us would prefer to stick our heads in the sand and pretend that the world isn't there. The church lives in the midst of the world, and we are going to be affected by what goes on. We will either retreat and try to hold what we've got, or we'll get out in the streets and begin to be aggressive in holding out this message of wholeness."

To read the full transcript of NCM's 1998 interview with Tom Nees, including more about the origins of the Church of the Nazarene, visit [ncm.org/neesinterview](http://ncm.org/neesinterview).

**Taylor:** He did not do things for the accolades or the applause of people. He did it because it was Kingdom work and for work that needed to be done. ... Tom was interested in living his faith out loud sacrificially because it was pleasing to God.

**Vassel:** The *identity* of the Church of the Nazarene is God made. And that it is incredible that the real Church of the Nazarene, the DNA ... is this spiritual place in which both the internal transformation and the external engagement is together. That is how it started. I think the message I would like [to share is that] any deviation from that is an aberration of the identity of the Church of the Nazarene. And Tom Nees epitomized what the Church of the Nazarene is called to look like in the world. ●

*All three of these participants have a long history in the Church of the Nazarene. Currently, **Rev. Althea Taylor** serves as executive director for The Immigration Alliance and as director for compassion, justice, and immigration for the Metro New York District of the Church of the Nazarene. **Rev. Dr. Sam Vassel** is the district superintendent of the Metro New York District. **Dr. Ron Benefiel** is the lead consultant for mission resources and pastoral relations in the PLNU Center for Pastoral Leadership.*



*God at*  
**WORK**  
*in Ukraine*

*Continuing Ministry During the Pandemic*

*By Ronda Rice Winderl*  
*Photos Courtesy of the Church of the Nazarene, Ukraine*



**E**ven though church services were on lockdown and many Nazarenes struggled with COVID-19, God has been at work in new ways during this difficult time.

Rev. Sergei and Olga Onofriichuk, who lead ministries in the town of Kazatin, Ukraine, have creatively assisted their community through food distribution to many who are experiencing great need, ongoing rehabilitation for addicts, and an alternative kindergarten and school for the town.

Recognizing that many of the poorest people in the town were heavily affected by the virus, members of the Kazatin church organized and delivered food packages, basic medical and toiletry supplies, and school materials. Most importantly, they checked on the needs of these families. While similar projects were happening throughout Ukraine, the projects in Kazatin are a good example of partnership with new and particularly vulnerable families.

### THE REHABILITATION CENTER

During COVID-19, quarantine restrictions made the work of the church's rehabilitation center in Kazatin more difficult. The rehab program helps people who come to the center after being freed from addiction to drugs or alcohol, and the center serves as a hostel for those without housing and needing guidance. Spiritual, emotional, and physical counseling are the heart of the program.

The residents in the first step of rehab continued with their in-house programs during the pandemic, but those in the second step transition house were often without work unless they had an essential job. Even though this was a very difficult situation, by God's grace, all the men in the transition house have now resumed work, except for one on medical leave. Though not being able to work during quarantine was frustrating to everyone, they survived and are now thriving. Throughout the 16 years of the rehab center's work, many men have experienced the transformative love of Christ with a future and now serve with their families in the Kazatin Church of the Nazarene.

### THE SCHOOL

Olga is the administrator for the alternative kindergarten and school—the Marvel Kindergarten and Cleverland School—located in the Kazatin church. Currently, the school serves about 60 children from the community through their creative program that includes English training every day. All the teachers are Christians, and most of them are from the Kazatin Church. Often, the school children are invited to Kids Club—the field's name for Nazarene holistic child development programs—events as well, forming a bridge between church and school programs. Through

the school, church members and teachers were also able to identify families in need of food assistance.

“This is a very difficult time for me,” one parent shares. “I am raising two children myself, and it's always difficult for me. But last year, due to quarantine, I practically didn't work and everything was simply unbearable. The food that the church gave us literally helped us through this terrible time.”

Actually, COVID-19 served as a benefit for this school because during the six months of public school closings in Kazatin, many new students attended this private school when adaptive quarantine was in effect for four months, allowing private schools to operate with restrictions. Thus, many new families have discovered the witness of the church in Kazatin as a result of their experience with the school and its teachers during the pandemic.

### “MANY NEW FAMILIES HAVE DISCOVERED THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH IN KAZATIN.”

“Thank you so much for the help that your church provides to our family during this very difficult period of quarantine,” another parent told the church. “I thank you for the school that you opened and for the opportunity to work, for taking care of my children and all the help that you provide to us.”

A new law in Ukraine has recently made it possible for churches to provide educational opportunities. The Ukraine District dreams that someday it can provide excellent education for the community from kindergarten through college.

### GOD'S WORK CONTINUES

God always has better plans than anyone can ever imagine; He used the difficulties of COVID-19 to provide paths for His work in Kazatin and throughout Ukraine.

“It is impossible not to notice what you are doing in our city,” shares another person who was assisted by the church. “Likewise, now in the most difficult period of life, you provide tremendous support to many people. It so happened that in 2020 there was pregnancy and childbirth and it was not easy, but ... your participation in my life is a miracle.” ●

*Ronda Winderl is a professor emerita at Point Loma Nazarene University. She, along with her husband, Carl, is serving as a missionary for the Church of the Nazarene in Kyiv, Ukraine.*



# Dreaming of More

AN OUTREACH TO YOUNG MOTHERS IN COLOMBIA

by NCM Communications  
Photos Courtesy of José Luis Becerra

**F**or a few years, Valentina\* had been serving as a social worker in a hospital in a town near Bogota, Colombia. She wanted to help the patients there by giving them food, finding clothing, or praying with them. She was frustrated, though. No one seemed interested in helping with the outreach.

Around the same time, José Luis Becerra was planting a new Church of the Nazarene in the same town. He and the church leaders had been praying for a way to become more involved in the community; they wanted to be used strategically to show God's love through compassion. When Valentina invited them into the work, it was an answer to that prayer.

"We felt that was God's response for us—God's answer for us," Becerra says.

Valentina was thrilled—many other churches in the area had expressed indifference toward the project already. The church plant was to call themselves *Hechos 29*—the Acts 29 church. Their vision was to be another chapter of the book in the Bible about spreading the good news of

Christ, and they began to work in the hospital with passion. Though they had only 25 members, 12 of whom are children, they used their own money to begin financing the ministry in the hospital.

## A MINISTRY TO MOTHERS

In the beginning, the church leaders spent several days shadowing Valentina to see what she was doing. They realized that the hospital was too big for their small church to reach every area. The ministry would have to focus on one group of people.

"The vision ... is to work especially with children, with teenagers, with young people, because we found that all these generations are in a very high risk to lose their faith," Becerra explains.

When they came to the maternity ward in the hospital, they saw many young mothers, many of whom were teenagers. The new mothers were also often alone. In fact, an annual study put out by the hospital estimates that 40 percent of those who give birth there are under the age of 17; Becerra says that many of these pregnancies were the result

of abuse. The church leaders were extremely moved by the young mothers and knew this was the area where they could serve.

Now, the Pregnant and Nursing Mothers ministry serves mothers with infants and children up to 5 years old. Many of the women aren't able to bring their children home to the life they would want. Some have been displaced by violence or are living as refugees from Venezuela. Others are living in poverty without a good way to break out of the cycle. Through the ministry, they are participating in a holistic service.

**“WHEN WE ARE SEEKING PEOPLE, OF COURSE THERE ARE MANY STORIES.”**

At first, the church members started bringing snacks to the mothers who were in the maternity ward. Most of those who visit the hospital are women from the church to help the young mothers be more comfortable. Every Thursday morning, they visited to offer food and prayers. Because the mothers didn't stay in the hospital long term, the church soon also designed a database to keep track of their names, contact information, and prayer requests.

“We want to be a church of acts, [of] God's love acts,” Becerra says. “We are trying to see the holistic vision for this project.”

### A CHURCH OF ACTION

The project has grown over the past three years to include workshops with the mothers and with the hospital administration staff. Mothers can participate in trainings to support emotional health or learn more about entrepreneurship.

Pandemic restrictions made hospital visits much harder, so church members have been relying on their database to check in with the women instead. They visit from a distance and provide food and other essentials.

“We are trying to reboot the ministry and

trying to think about what we are going to do with that activity inside the pandemic time,” Becerra shares.

This is particularly challenging because often the ministry is one of presence. When a young woman was struggling with a deep depression after losing a child, one woman who participates in the ministry went to her home right away to pray and provide emotional support.

“When we are seeking people, of course there are many stories,” Becerra shares. “[Church members were very affected] when we saw how God's hands were touching people in the hospital.”

This year, *Hechos 29* hopes to open another church with 24 of the mothers they've met through the program. The new church will be closer to where the women live, making it easier for them to have access. ●

*\*Name is changed for privacy.*



One small church in Colombia is supporting mothers through love and presence.



Volunteers from the church visit the hospital to provide supplies for new mothers.

# VOICES



**T**o hope for a better future in this world—for the poor, the sick, the lonely and depressed, for the slaves, the refugees, the hungry and homeless, for the abused, the paranoid, the downtrodden and despairing, and in fact for the whole wide, wonderful, and wounded world—is not something else, something extra, something tacked on to the gospel as an afterthought.

And to work for that intermediate hope, the surprising hope that comes forward from God's ultimate future into God's urgent present, is not a distraction from the task of mission and evangelism in the present. It is a central, essential, vital, and life-giving part of it.

Mostly, Jesus himself got a hearing from his contemporaries because of what he was doing. They saw him saving people from sickness and death, and they heard him talking about a salvation, the message for which they had longed, that would go

beyond the immediate into the ultimate future. But the two were not unrelated, the present one a mere visual aid of the future one or a trick to gain people's attention.

The whole point of what Jesus was up to was that he was doing, close up, in the present, what he was promising long-term, in the future. And what he was promising for that future, and doing in that present, was not saving souls for a disembodied eternity but rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so they could enjoy, already in the present, that renewal of creation which is God's ultimate purpose—and so they could thus become colleagues and partners in that larger project.

This excerpt is taken from *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* by N.T. Wright.

# GO DEEPER



## READ

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*Overrated* by Eugene Cho asks a hard question: How do we go from talking about justice to actually living justly? “Our calling is not simply to change the world but to be changed ourselves,” he writes.



## STUDY

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In *Encountering the God of Love: Portraits from the Old Testament*, edited by Brad E. Kelle and Stephanie Smith Matthews, Old Testament scholars and professors offer a perspective of the Scriptures that shows God’s absolute compassionate nature.

AVAILABLE THROUGH THE FOUNDRY



## WATCH

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The documentary *Bending the Arc* follows the story of Paul Farmer, Jim Yong Kim, and Ophelia Dahl. Together, they have worked for decades in health care and justice, intentionally and sensitively building access to good health care where there wasn’t any before. This film includes images of medical workers caring for critically ill people and may not be suitable for younger audiences.



## LISTEN

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The New Activist podcast, presented by the International Justice Mission, showcases activists and leaders addressing humanitarian issues all over the world. Topics include human trafficking, refugees, foster care, and more.

# SNAPSHOT

“In the midst of all the pain, oppression, and lack of meaning in life, the Church must proclaim the answer that is provided to us so clearly in Scripture. It is simple. We must be loving like Jesus in this fractured world.”

—John M. Perkins



*To read more about how the church is responding to crisis with compassion, turn to page 12.*



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