

Foreword

Jesse C. Middendorf, General Superintendent

Our lives are shaped by stories which help us construct meaning, understand how to relate to our world, and build community. A story about a family ancestor has shaped my life. I'd like to share it with you.

Lewis A. Armistead was a Civil War general who faced his greatest test on the final day of the epic Battle of Gettysburg. Asked to take part in an ill-fated infantry assault later known as "Pickett's Charge," Armistead knew his men faced an insurmountable task—they knew it too—but he steadied them by waving his hat at the end of his saber as he led them into battle. Though he and many others lost their lives that day, his gesture of bravery, despite overwhelming odds, epitomized grace under fire.

Today, when I am faced with a formidable task, my resolve stiffens and my confidence in God's sustaining grace increases and I remind myself, "It's time to put your hat on the end of your sword and meet the challenge."

This story from my past provides a perspective which informs my present and future. In the same way, our denominational story renders meaning and purpose that shapes our lives. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre said, "I can only answer the question, 'What am I to do?,' if I can answer the prior question, 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"

"Denomination" means something very different today than it did in 1908 when our founders gathered at Pilot Point, Texas, to inaugurate the Church of the Nazarene. The optimism that genuine Christianity could speak powerfully to the issues of the day prompted some to declare the new period "the Christian Century." Early Nazarenes shared this optimism and set about the monumental task of "spreading scriptural holiness across these lands."

Now, at the beginning of a new century, we have witnessed a generation of unprecedented social and cultural change. Pluralism, secularism, and post-modernity have altered the religious landscape. Rather than a "missionary-sending country," America is itself a "mission field." Immigrants cross U.S. borders in vast numbers, people are mobile, seldom staying in one location for any length of time, and cyberspace redefines our concept of place and community.

While some may consider these developments negatively or feel a sense of drift over what it means to be Wesleyan-Holiness people, I believe our present circumstances may very well present our greatest opportunity for renewal and revitalization—as we connect with and reflect on the rich and diverse stories of our founding and shaping. Perhaps, there is no time like now to give these stories a new hearing.

In *Nazarene Roots: Pastors, Prophets, Revivalists, and Reformers*, denominational archivist Stan Ingersol brings together a series of life narratives written over a 20-year period that reveal essential truths about the people called Nazarenes. In this book, we meet some of the great heroes and heroines of the Early Church, early Methodism, and those who shaped what we know today as the “Church of the Nazarene.”

Our founders were rooted in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. They departed established mainline churches over concerns about spiritual decline to seek broader methods to “Christianize” Christianity. They were fearless, bent on a passion to engage the neglected corners of society, and share their faith in a God whose grace could transform even the most despised.

The Church of the Nazarene started as a people movement, and we are privileged that our denominational story reflects such rich regional, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Our decision to become a truly international church is a reflection of the vision and prayers of our founders so many years ago.

Nazarene founders and shapers also had to contend with sweeping cultural change, particularly urbanization and the rise of industrial society. Rather than lose heart, they had confidence that the eternal God accompanied them along history’s arc. They understood themselves to be part of a larger Christian story of God’s redemptive work in the new century.

Perhaps you are encountering these stories for the first time, or you may be very familiar with the story of our Nazarene family. In either case, I think you will be challenged, stirred, and strengthened by this reflection into our past.

I pray these stories will encourage your heart, empower your ministry, and inspire you to create new chapters in the Nazarene story.