

**RENEWING OUR MISSION:
THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF
ASIA-PACIFIC NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY¹**

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When history professor James Cameron published his history of the first fifty years of Eastern Nazarene College, the school from which I graduated, in 1968, the saintly emeritus academic dean, Bertha Munro, was in a wholly sanctified way a bit irritated by the book's inevitable positivism, or, to put it another way, by the book's lack of humanness. As a result, she wrote her own memoir, entitled, *The Years Teach*. I will try to be more like Dean Munro than Dr. Cameron this morning.

The mission of APNTS has remained remarkably the same these forty years, to prepare men and women for servant-like, Christ-like leadership in Asia, the Pacific, and the world. When I contemplate the lives and ministries of the more than 600 graduates of APNTS I believe that we have been fulfilling the mission of APNTS to prepare men and women for Christ-like leadership in Asia, the Pacific, and the world.

From the beginning, APNTS was intended as an international school, a graduate school, and, as a Nazarene school, one committed to Wesleyan ways. The goal was to prepare both competent ministers and credentialed teachers for the Bible Colleges of the two regions we represented. In the beginning, ministry to Filipino Nazarenes seemed primary.

When we began, we did not foresee who much APNTS would have an impact on the world. Across the years, our reach has grown around the globe, to include students from Africa, South America, North America, and Europe as well as Asia and the Pacific. At the same time, we are ministering to students from more denominations than we imagined, and our faculty and staff likewise reflects this growing diversity.

The school could have been anywhere in the regions. Why did the church leaders decide upon Taytay, Philippines, to build what was to become the second graduate-level seminary of the Church of the Nazarene anywhere in the world? Donald Owens had been elected the president of a yet-to-be seminary when he was teaching at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City. (I was a student there at the time, and I dimly remember something being said about the beginning of a seminary in Asia.) The Philippines was chosen because of its centrality to the regions that APNTS would serve: the Asia Region, which then included India, and the South Pacific Region. In the Philippines, English was a common language (one of the two official languages), which would help international students. The Philippines was affordable and politically stable. The people were hospitable. In 1979 the Church of the Nazarene purchased this site, a former orphanage called "Children's Gardens." The site was not directly in the city, but was close enough to allow students access to the city. Dr. Owens believed that APNTS would be a strategic place to train for urban evangelism. Owens drew together a faculty for the school, and, in that regard, Dr. Owens contacted me on July 13, 1982. I had been studying Caribbean history and culture as part of my

¹ Not all of this was spoken on November 25, 2023. This paper represents a longer draft.

work at Johns Hopkins. I contacted World Mission about the possibility of a one-year assignment teaching in Trinidad. World Mission said, no, but would I be willing to go somewhere else. I responded, sure, and might have been one year in Trinidad ended up being forty years in the Philippines. I was appointed as a missionary on October 1, 1982.

In the meantime, Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City held several extension classes. The idea that the Philippines provided a place of political stability was shattered by assassination of Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, on August 21, 1983. I arrived in the Philippines on November 5, 1983, and classes began nine days later, on November 15. The only other full-time professor was Dr. Ronald Beech, who had been serving with his wife Neva in the Philippines since 1962. He had earned his doctorate at the Asia Baptist Graduate School of Theology in Baguio while teaching at Luzon Nazarene Bible College. Dr. Beech taught in the area of New Testament, and served as both registrar and academic dean. Dr. Beech prepared the first school catalogue. Neva Beech taught English classes. Dr. Angelito Agbuya, the pastor of the Angeles City Church of the Nazarene, the largest Nazarene Church in the Philippines, taught Christian education and ministry, and directed supervised ministry. Dr. Owens taught missions.

The first classes included the late Carol Binavince (Benzonan), Clemente Haban, Nida Acuyen (Villareal), Rose Gapit (Jellard), Annie Guinto (Ronquillo), Ricareda Valenzuela, Abner Valenzuela, and Rose Suyat. By the summer and first semester of 1984 we had students from Korea (including the Hongs, who are with us on this occasion of our fortieth anniversary), and India as well as additional Filipino students. The Library, located on the second floor of the administration building that we now call Owens Hall, had a few hundred books. We had four classrooms, also on the second floor of Owens. We used what is now the lecture hall in Owens for chapel services. The business office was in what is now room 106. The dining hall and student center sat on what is now the NCEE building. There were fourteen cottages, left over from the orphanage, for student, faculty, and staff housing. Gradually the termites destroyed most of these. There was a deep well on campus from which we derived our water.

On January 15, 1984, General Superintendent Eugene Stowe, who had been a leading promoter for the founding of the school, came for inauguration ceremonies [see artifact]. The faculty was installed.

Dr. Owens soon sensed the need for new leadership for the school, and Dr. E. LeBron Fairbanks came as president in July 1984. We spent many faculty meetings discussing the mission statement and every word of every policy. Dr. James Edlin, a specialist in Old Testament, came as Academic Dean. For a year, because of him, I would say, the faculty all wore ties every day for a year.

Ferdinand Marcos called for a snap election on February 7, 1986. That led to a series of events that included the famous EDSA revolution – just down Ortigas from us. Here in Taytay, we did not know exactly what to expect. Our students were not interested in joining the revolution. For a while, no planes flew in or out of the Philippines. We prayed together. We suspended classes. Thankfully, the revolution was peaceful. I remember the first day when classes resumed the sound of the first planes that were landing at the airport.

Fairbanks soon realized that if the school was to fulfill its mission as an international school, that international students should have student visas. That would require, he learned, recognition by the Philippine governments Department of Education, Culture, and Sports (DECS), as it was then called.

That was big, because no other graduate-level seminary (and only one other evangelical college) had ever submitted itself to the government recognition. Evangelicals in the Philippines feared government intrusion. We did not fear. We secured our permit in 1987, and full recognition on June 13, 1988. We participated in the founding of Asia Graduate School of Theology. As soon as possible, we sought and received accreditation from the Asia Theological Association.

I have been privileged to have worked with Donald Owens, LeBron Fairbanks, John Nielson, and other men and women of great ability and humility. This is not an easy place for a leader. The president of the school is accountable to a Board of Trustees, a regional director, the Global Mission Director, the International Board of Education, and the General Superintendent in Jurisdiction. As well, the president considers the requirements of accrediting bodies and the Commission on Higher Education of the Philippines.

Though finances are always the major challenge for a leader of APNTS, we have been blessed with the steady support of the Church of the Nazarene. It would be difficult to compute, but I imagine that the denomination has invested well over ten million dollars (P550,000,000) for APNTS. Even though there have been difficult days financially, especially when some major component of the infrastructure fails and needs to be replaced, when the water pump falls into the well, when we have to treat a termite problem, in all of these forty years, we met every payroll. Yes, there have been times when we have had to pray hard about a particular financial need, and time when the president of the school has had to carry the financial burden in himself, but over all our faith in God, and his faithfulness to us is steady, not episodic. That does not mean that there is less faith; our faith is a constant way of life. Our workers may not be paid enough, but they can be assured of their salary. I guess that is why we have workers that have served her 20, 30, even more years. Students have received more than they know. Imagine, if we have received ten million dollars from the Church of the Nazarene (and we have probably received much more than that), that would mean at least \$15,000 for every student (no matter the denomination) who has graduated from APNTS from the Church of the Nazarene.

Though our denominational headquarters is in Kansas, our intention from the beginning as a faculty was orient ourselves around the issues facing this part of the world. To help us, within our faculty we have had teachers from Korea, India, and Japan as well as the Philippines. We have had two Asian presidents, one from Japan, and one from Korea. In addition, we have had lecturers from such countries as Australia, China, Indonesia, New Zealand, and Thailand. We have had two Asian academic deans, one from Korea, and one from the Philippines. More often than not, administrative councils have included as many Asians as Westerners. Usually, across these years, an equal number of women as men have sat around our faculty meetings. (I started to list the women who have served here, and there are too many to name. They include our emerita Lourdes Manaois, Janice Nielson, and Beverly Gruver.)

During the first four years, I served as chaplain and dean of students. Dean of students about my own age, several older. From that time, I have tried never to refer to our dorms as girls' dorm or boys' dorm. Because I did not consider myself a boy, though I still had a lot of growing up to do. For instance, Dr. Fairbanks thought "Make Me a Servant" was the best song to encapsulate his theology of ministry, and I wrote a long note saying that maybe it is not the best thing for we Americans to be asking students from once-colonized countries to want to be servants.

We had only two outside phones coming into campus. We had a loud speaker system that you could hear from all over the campus. Later we got an intercom system for the residences and dorms. Dr. Fairbanks was so excited to be able to install a fax machine. Not until the 1990s did computers come along. John Nielson was the first to have one, a Mac. I waited as long as I could, and when I finally got my first Toshiba, with Microsoft. I learned as little as I needed to know about to do what I needed to do – which reflects my life’s philosophy about technology (as my colleagues well know).

I taught Constructive Theology the first four years, and Doctrine of Holiness for quite a few years more. I discovered H. Orton Wiley, and for the Holiness class students read Wesley’s *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Grider’s *Entire Sanctification*, and Wynkoop’s *Theology of Love*. We tried to find a middle way. Though some of the older students who had grown up with the older holiness paradigms were shocked by her, it was obvious that Wynkoop held the greatest appeal to Asians.

We were talking about this in holiness class, love. One of our Korean students admitted he did not love, but, in fact, hated, a Japanese student, a particularly vivacious older Japanese female student with an infectious laugh you could hear down the hallways. It made him angry, the Korean student said, whenever he heard her laugh. His overcoming this hatred, and opening up his heart to love, was one avenue, I believe, of sanctifying grace in his life.

Fewer students testified to sanctifying grace as a result of the Methods of Research subject. Government recognition meant placing Methods of Research in our curriculum for all degree programs, and, foolishly, I volunteered myself to teach it. I found that there was a textbook published in the Philippines by Carter Good, but the book by John Best was better. Among other important information, students such as Nativity Petallar memorized the Library of Congress classification system.

Students will not remember that I made many jokes in classes. They will not remember because of the humorless nature of the jokes. Well, I had tried smiling, but it frightened small children.²

Students will better remember that I always carried my coffee to class. This was out of fear that because my lectures were so boring, I myself might fall asleep. Because some students thought that I might be drinking too much coffee, I cut down from five to four cups of coffee a day by getting a bigger cup.³

Having seen how Korean professors are required to dress in Korea with coat and tie, with my own long sleeve shirts and button-down collars, I tried – unsuccessfully – to set an example of how faculty should dress. One of our missionaries said she wished she could cut the sleeves of my shirts, and others have thought to do worse.

Personally, I have a lot of regrets about how I taught in those first several years. I taught as my seminary professors taught, by lecture. Lecture. Lecture. I brought my thick notebooks to class [artifact], and read a lot from my notes. I gave objective tests, and prided myself on finding a way to create perfect curves: the same number of F’s as A’s, with most students getting C’s from me – yes, A for Agbuya, B for Beech, and C for Cunningham. The only relief to the lectures, my occasional use of the white board and hand-outs. So many handouts. So many trees had to die.

² A David Letterman joke as I recall.

³ Yet another David Letterman joke.

During the next decade, I began to use an overhead projector. I thought to myself, how progressive I am, I am preparing overhead transparencies! But I still brought my thick notebooks to class.

Meanwhile, I was using my notebooks to write the two Course of Study modules in Christian Heritage for the Church of the Nazarene, and my notes for Nazarene History and Polity came to be *Our Watchword and Song*.

Instead of lecturing all of the time, I gave students the privilege of class presentations. I assigned questions. In other words, the students lectured rather than myself, and then I would give some response or clarification. I also had changed my thinking about objective tests, and began to give grades based on student out-put. Or, I should say, by footnotes, as every former student knows. An A for using primary sources.

Then, power points came along. By 2007 I was getting the hang of it. By that time, I could discard my notebooks, and (especially since I had been teaching the same subjects for twenty-four years) just use the power points as my outline. Still boring lectures. Just more pictures.

Outside of class, koinonia groups have been a primary source of fellowship. Once when I asked our group what kind of work they had done before, one of our Filipino students said that his job in the province had been circumcising pigs. You can see why, among the thousands of things said, that would be memorable. For a few years, students in my koinonia group watched Philippine Basketball Association games at my place and ate ice cream after Wednesday night prayer meetings.

Wednesday night prayer meetings included testimonies of students – without rehearsal, without microphone, just testimonies. And for chapels, my happy times were playing hymns alongside Janice Nielson on the keyboard that we called the “organ.” I also started playing hymns with classes. Finally, though it took a few years, I assimilated this side of myself with the historian side.

Revivals and spiritual deepening weeks came. One was with African American female evangelist Estelle Cyrus, who brought two prayer partners with her, two African American women, one a college professor and the other a laundry-woman. During that time, we had a former Roman Catholic priest from India with a PhD in Old Testament from the Pontifical Institute of Rome among our students. He came forward during one of the altar calls, and the African American laundry woman was the one who prayed over him.

I have always been glad for the interdenominational character of APNTS. Following John Wesley’s “if your heart is right, give me your hand” philosophy, we have never made doctrine a test for either admittance or graduation. This annoyed one of our ATA accreditors, who believed that evangelical seminaries should not graduate modernists or heretics. But a Wesleyan way of theological education welcomes all, fundamentalists, modernists, and heretics. After all, Wesley himself said, we will see heretics in heaven, but we will not see all of those who have held to rigid orthodoxy. At APNTS we have welcomed a Pentecostal unitarian turned away by Pentecostal seminaries, and a not-yet-Christian Buddhist spouse of one of our students who found Christ through the Introduction to Theology class she was required to take to live on campus. I could happily tell a General Superintendent that a Presbyterian graduate was taking the message of holiness to Presbyterians, and I am as equally happy that as a result of one of our classes a Presbyterian student had his pastor put “Presbyterian” on his church’s signage, which had lacked it. If we make better Presbyterians of Presbyterians, better Baptists of Baptists, and better Pentecostals of Pentecostals, we have fulfilled a dream of Phineas Bresee, our founder, that the Church of the

Nazarene would be a leaven and yeast among denominations. After all, our mission is to prepare men and women for Christ-like leadership and excellence in ministries, not to make them Nazarenes.

By about 2008 it was clear that APNTS might be headed in new directions. With the Board of Trustees, we began discussing the possibility of leasing or even selling the property that fronted Ortigas.

We did not sell or lease the property at that time, but there several new directions that APNTS took: toward extension education, toward doctoral-level education, toward holistic child development, and toward the community surrounding us.

When Geneva Silvernail became president of the Melanesia Nazarene Bible College in Papua New Guinea, she wanted to upgrade the credentials of its faculty. It was much too slow and costly to send them to APNTS, so she suggested that we start an extension program there. Having worked as academic dean, I was sometimes fearful of CHED, but when Geneva threatened to work with another school, I mustered my courage and we began a Master of Ministry program in PNG. Ten graduated in 2011. Not being struck by lightening for have done so, we began extension programs in Myanmar, and in two creative access countries.

In May 2007, while I was serving as interim president, Dan Balayo, a former student, and the field's child sponsorship coordinator invited me to attend a holistic child development conference in Chiangmai, Thailand, sponsored by Compassion International and Fuller Theological Seminary. Everything came together as I listened to Menchit Wong, Phyllis Kilbourne, Daniel Brewster and others describe children in crisis. I thought of Janice Nielson's "Kids' Klubs" every Saturday morning, and missions professor Robert Donahue's ministry with street children. Compassion International volunteered the salary of a professor in Holistic Child Development. As soon as I got back to Taytay, I took up that offer. I had in mind Nativity Petallar without even knowing that she had been employed by Compassion. Dr. Petallar was here in January 2009.

Since three other Nazarene schools in the region were then offering master's degrees, the Board of Trustees had encouraged us to begin doctoral degrees. In 2009, we began a PhD in Holistic Child Development in cooperation with the Asia Graduate School of Theology. Two other PhDs followed in Transformational Learning and Transformational Development. The doctoral degrees reflect what Wesleyans call "practical divinity." These PhD programs have flourished far, far, beyond expectations.

During those years, we collected partnerships, not only with AGST and Compassion International, but with Korean Nazarenes, local barangay officials, Food for the Hungry, Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, the Department of Education, Bresee Institute, and etc. We received Wesleyan Church and Free Methodist missionary faculty members – faculty members raising their own support for the privilege of teaching at APNTS!

We reached beyond our walls. Gradually, for several years, so-called "squatters" had begun to build alongside the walls that separate our school from the creek that flows in the middle of the campus. Occasionally, they would come over the wall (it was not hard to do) to collect some of the mangoes, papaya, or wood (which they used for cooking), and the administrative council asked whether or not we should build a bigger, better, higher wall. Instead, we built relationships. SBO president Marc Katalbas, Ilde Detalo, from the field office, and myself walked through the Rowenas community, saw their needs. Students such as Dorys Pugong began to get involved, holding Bible studies and ministering to the children.

For our twenty-fifth anniversary, held a big event on our basketball court and invited the people of the community on campus for a concert (headlined by the Philippine Allstars, a hip-hop dance group). We had 800 neighbors on campus for the first time. Walls were breaking down.

Bill Kwon (Kwon Dong Hwan) became deeply involved in Rowenas. Bill was a graduate of APNTS in Christian Communication, and he was already teaching for us. For the sake of his ordination he was taking Doctrine of Holiness, and I remember saying in class that holiness is not just something of the head, not just something of the heart, but something of the hands. If so, Bill said to me, we must do more for the people of the Rowenas community. He started one program after another, but of the most lasting significance was a child sponsorship program between the Korean churches of the Nazarene and children of the community. Many of them had a hard time finishing elementary school, but, with the help of compassionate Koreans, they were enabled to finish not only elementary school, but high school, and, now, some of them, college. The River of Life Church of the Nazarene began under graduate Jackson Natividad, and there has been an amazing community transformation in Rowenas. Even though we were not a church, but a theological institution, we were still a people of God, and we learned together what it meant to be a people of God called to be holy in this time and in this place.

Then a major typhoon, Ondoy, hit Taytay in September 2009. The rains came down, the floods came up, and our neighbors' houses were washed quickly down the raging, rushing river that usually was but the trickle of a creek. Our neighbors came over the wall. They knew, and we knew, that they were welcome in this place. I was not here, but the community quickly mobilized, boiling water for rice, getting dry clothes, finding places for them to sleep on campus, playing games with and attending to the children. It was a breakthrough. We hoped that students from the various countries of the Asia and Pacific region would carry this same message wherever it was that God led them, and partner with others, see the needs, love, and figure out what it meant in their particular time and in their particular place to be a people of God called to be holy.

While God was opening our hearts to the people of Rowenas, he was opening up our doors to students such as Aweke Solomon from far-off Ethiopia, and Ernesto Lozano from far-away Peru.

A few years ago, I was trying to more intentionally follow up on our graduates. I saw some of them going through very difficult times, like the death or disappearance of a spouse. I was glad to talk to Alofa Nofoa, a Samoan transplanted in New Zealand, a few months before his death, and see how much he was trying to be like both St. Francis (for whom he named his son), and Phineas Bresee, feeding the homeless and hungry people of Auckland.

As I surf through the facebook of former students I am struck by the fact that we have produced life-long learners, and I am also struck by how many of them are still showing old pictures of their days with friends at APNTS. For many of them, their days at APNTS were some of the best days of their lives.

Just before the pandemic, I had the privilege of being at the regional conference in Chiangmai. Imagine, to see so many former students, and to feel equally at home with those from Papua New Guinea, Korea, Myanmar, and many other countries as well as the Philippines. My life motto is: "The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner. He to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong. But he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign place." If that is what perfection is, I think a lot of us are there: the entire world is a foreign place.

Zoom became an unexpected way of bridging cultures for Christ. Going back to the ways in which my teaching has changed, I had become just a bit more acquainted with Moodle. The pandemic forced upon all of us a crash course in teaching on line. About that time, I was preparing to teach “Spirituality and Transformational Learning.” Though I had taught the class before, badly, I read much more deeply and realized that the bridge concept between spirituality and transformational learning is “hospitality.” But how to be hospitable through Zoom? In this case, hospitality was a matter of the heart. In that class, and in the other classes I was teaching during the pandemic, we tried to stay more attuned than ever to the affective domain, the emotional state of our students, some of whose parents or village-mates were dying of covid, and then, in the case of our Myanmar students, caught up in a vicious civil war. It required sensitivity, time, prayer, hospitality of heart. So, after forty years, I am still learning how to teach.

FUTURE

In a similar way, APNTS is envisioning what it means to be a theological seminary in the Wesleyan tradition in the Asia-Pacific, and in the world, as we move toward the middle of the twenty-first century.

Moses stood on the mountain overlooking the promised land, a promised land that he would never get to enjoy, and reminded the people (Deuteronomy 1:30-31): “The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the wilderness. There you saw how *the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his child*, all the way you went until you reached this place.”

What promised-land future has God in store for APNTS? Just as the Israelites, after wandering for forty years had to learn what it meant to be the people of God all over again, not in the wilderness, but in a very different, settled environment, we too have to relearn what it means to be a seminary called to be Wesleyan in this time and in this place.

Forty-four years ago, when I was in seminary, no professor used any visual aids, unless it was the chalk board and hand-outs. Later, Chester Galloway persuaded Old Testament professor Harvey Finney to use an overhead projector using something we called “transparencies,” made out of clear plastic. Now that skill is unnecessary, and very little of that skill carries over into the making of power points (unless it is this: make your fonts large enough for people to read!). My point is, forty-four years from now, teachers will not be using power points. We have no clue what they will be using, but it will not be power points, and there will be little or nothing of the skill it takes to make power points carrying over into the year 2067 (unless it is this: make your fonts large enough for people to read!).

Dr. Hitoshi Fukue, our fourth president, told the story of how he had learned how to evangelize when he was a student at NTS in Kansas City in the 1960s. They taught him the four spiritual laws, which begin something like, “if you were to die tonight do you know that you would go to heaven?” He tried that when he got back to Japan. Wrong thing to do! He had forgotten how offensive that sort of question would be to Japanese. What he valued, in retrospect, were his theology and church history classes.

At the same time, there is a kind of unfinished agenda for APNTS. Our uniqueness, even our mission, is to do what no other seminary would do, to articulate Asian theologies in a Wesleyan mode.

There is also an unfinished agenda in finding Asian ways of teaching and learning, ways that are not so individualistic, and not so competitive, ways that are more community-oriented, and cooperative – ways that are more like Christ.

The mission of APNTS, to prepare men and women for Christ-like leadership and excellence in ministries, certainly fits with the mission of the Church of the Nazarene as a whole, to make Christ-like disciples in the nations. We are a denominational school with a Wesleyan tradition that pursues holiness here and now. Holiness is love being perfected in us by the moment-by-moment, the casting-out-sin presence of the Holy Spirit, and the evidence of this holiness is Christ-likeness. As a denomination, and as a school, we cannot hope to make Christ-like disciples, or Christ-like leaders, anywhere unless we ourselves are like Christ.

Long, long after Moses, the prophet Zechariah returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity. What Zechariah hoped for, even envisioned, was a future in which (8:10) ten persons from other nations would take hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, “Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.” There have been a thousand persons from forty or so nations who have come to APNTS. Why have they come? Could it have been because of our library? Maybe not. Our dormitories? No, probably not. Maybe our CHED recognition and accreditation? Let’s hope that was not the reason. Because of its affiliation with the Church of the Nazarene? Doubtful. Certainly because of the not-only-brilliant-but-extremely-good-looking faculty? No, I do not think so. Scholarships? Maybe not. This is what I would hope: that they have come, that that thousands of others will come in the next forty years, because they heard that God is with us in this place.