I have yet to meet a member of the Church of the Nazarene who, after studying the denomination’s article on sanctification, thought the article was perfectly worded. Everyone believes article ten on sanctification needs to be improved. For many, the most obvious improvements revolve around poor sentence structure and antiquated wording.

But the call for change in the formulation of the denomination’s article on sanctification goes beyond cosmetic alterations. A growing number of leaders in the denomination – what seems to be the overwhelming majority – are calling for substantive changes. (Examples: Guatemala conference: What had only been talked about in small meetings or in the academy was laid open for all; Porter quote: “We believe our denomination is in a theological crisis” Quanstrom book: “The question in the last decades of the 20th century was whether or not the Church of the Nazarene had a coherent and cogent doctrine of holiness at all.” Bond paper: Nazarene Archives label for current time period: “Searching for an identity in an era of change;” Relational Holiness: the book Michael Lodahl and I co-wrote)

In this session, I want to suggest fifteen changes that I think should be made to article ten in the manual. Some are cosmetic, most are more substantial.

I hope this exercise is not seen as the attempt by some radical discontent who exists on the edges of the Church of the Nazarene. Instead, I am someone who loves the church and is committed to her. I plan to remain in her arms even if all the changes I propose are ignored.

Although I take full responsibility for these suggestions, I know that I do not stand alone in believing that the suggestions I offer are helpful. Other – pastors, superintendents, theologians, Sunday school teachers, scholars of various sorts -- agree with many if not all of my suggestions. In the past few years, I have been in conversation with hundreds of
denomination leaders. And the suggestions I offer have been shaped and molded by my conversations with these influential people.

I realize that not everyone will agree with me. Of course, getting everyone to agree on these types of things is next to impossible. Gone are the days when, as a tiny denomination, a person like H. Orton Wiley could sit down alone in a back room at the general assembly and hammer out an article of faith that virtually everyone accepts. We are a large denomination with diverse views. We need to respect this diversity while simultaneously seeking a degree of unity that can bring us together in one accord. We need unity without requiring uniformity. We must appreciate and allow diversity without slipping into chaos and incoherence.

Before offering the fifteen changes I suggest, let me also say that I offer these as starting points for discussion. They are not meant to be the stuff of stone tablets brought down from the mountain. Rather, my hope is that a conversation will ensue (actually, continue) that can move us toward a healthy revisioning of article ten together.

What I hope will transpire in the remainder of our time together is that we take the present article on entire sanctification and examine it for clues about how it should be reformulated. In the end, I hope our exercise will help us all to revision article ten in a way that is more faithful to our experiences of holiness, to the vision of John Wesley and many in the past holiness movement, and most importantly to a Wesleyan reading of the Bible.

**READ ARTICLE X (on powerpoint)**

**Suggestions for Revisioning Article Ten**

We should…

1. Drop the word “entire” from the article heading. Because…
   a. The phrase “entire sanctification” is only used once in Bible. As a people who regard scripture as principally important for those things necessary to salvation, do we want a phrase mentioned only once in the Bible to be the label of our distinctive doctrine? (NIV: “through and through,” KJV “wholly”)
b. In the one instance in which we find the phrase “entirely sanctified,” it is far from clear what the author means. (1 Thess. 5:23)

c. John Wesley did not use “entire sanctification” primarily to distinguish sanctification from justification. This strong distinction between the two is NOT characteristically Wesleyan. Rather, John Wesley used “entire sanctification” to emphasize that the sanctification present at one’s new birth requires subsequent expressions in the life of the Christian.

d. The phrase “entire sanctification” has come to mean in holiness circles something like “total commitment.” While total commitment to God ought to be promoted, this is not the meaning of entire sanctification in scripture (apparently) and not Wesley’s meaning. Interestingly, 1 Thes. 5:23 places all the work on God’s part, which undermines the urge to identify entire sanctification with total commitment.

e. Some might argue that keeping “Entire” in the title of Article X is appropriate on historical grounds. They may argue that we should not discard the identity of the denomination, which has been to emphasize not just sanctification but “entire sanctification.” This argument is undermined when we realize that the earliest Nazarenes did not think it important to add the label “entire” to sanctification. “Entire” was not added until the 1923 Manual.

2. Drop the language in the article that implies that sanctification is a singular, completed work (e.g., “that act of God”). Because…

   a. There is little biblical support for the idea of a single, completed work that has no subsequent divine work.

   b. If God continually sanctifies, why call entire sanctification “that act,” which is singular?

   c. Article ten contradicts itself – it is internally incoherent – when it speaks of one act securing sanctification in the first paragraph “that act” and then speaks of sanctification as involving growth in grace in later paragraphs. We
must aim for more precise language to avoid furthering confusion about holiness.

3. Affirm the experiences of Christians whose lives have been characterized by two definite experiences, but regard such experiences as descriptive of some Christians not prescriptive for all. Because…
   a. Although the language of a “second” work in article ten ought to be dropped, the notion that sanctification includes events subsequent to regeneration should be embraced. This notion of the continued transforming work of God in the lives of Christians seems to be at the heart of scripture and the theology of John Wesley.
   b. The language of subsequent events or experiences, which should be included in article ten, can account for the experience of some who point to two distinct experiences. Yet it can also account for the experience of others who point to multiple distinct experiences of sanctification.
   c. The language of secondness undermines the expectation of additional powerful movements of God in the lives of believers.
   d. The language of secondness inclines some to seek theologies (e.g., some Pentecostal theologies) suggesting that a third movement is more important than first two.
   e. Incidentally, there is no mention of “second” in the current article ten.

4. Describe sanctification as a component of and not an addition to salvation. Because…
   a. Unfortunately, most pastors and laity in the Church of the Nazarene talk about being saved and then sanctified. But sanctification is part of salvation.
   b. Jesus didn’t split the notion of salvation from sin and the notion of living the holy life. Rather, he understood them to be joined.

STOP FOR DISCUSSION
5. Describe sanctification in light of a relationship between God and creation; God initiates sanctification, but we must properly respond. Because…

   a. Affirm the heart of the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace, by which God lovingly acts first to empower us to respond. The first phrase of the current formulation of article ten does not reflect prevenient grace. It says that, “We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free of original sin, or depravity, and brought into the state of entire devotion to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect.” This suggests that God does ALL the work.

   b. Affirm the Wesleyan dynamic of salvation at play in verses such as “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you?” Affirm the Pauline notion that creatures have an essential role in sanctification when he exhorts believers to “sanctify yourselves.”

   c. Interestingly, the first paragraph of article ten gives the impression that entire sanctification is solely the act of God. But the final paragraph says that entire sanctification “includes the impulse to grow in grace” and “this impulse must be consciously nurtured.” Here, humans are said to require a response.

   d. The article as currently formulated includes a strange irony. That is, unless one purposefully endeavors to give “careful attention to the requisites and processes of spiritual development and improvement in Christlikeness of character and personality,” the grace of entire sanctification apparently provided solely by an act of God can be “frustrated and ultimately lost.” This implies that through no act of our own God entirely sanctifies, but through our actions this entire sanctification can be undone. Remnants of the Reformed tradition’s understanding of divine sovereignty, total depravity, and predestination seem at play.

6. Affirm necessary roles for both the church and the individual in the initiating and ongoing experience of sanctification. Because…
a. Currently, the role of the church in sanctification is woefully underemphasized. The importance of the church practices and liturgy in the nurturing of holiness should be affirmed.

b. As important as language is for describing what we mean by sanctification, we must acknowledge that holy experience of the saints will never be adequately formulated in language.

7. Conceive of sanctification as God’s empowering to love and to avoid sin, not as the removal of a body of sin. Because….
   a. Wesleyans should affirm that Christians can be freed from the habits and lifestyle of sin. Freedom from sin involves God’s empowering to love and the breaking of cycles and habits of sin in our lives.
   b. However, the claim that Christians are freed from original sin is suspect for several reasons.
      i. Original sin as commonly conceived derives from Calvinist/Augustinian roots.
      ii. The manual language of “made free from original sin” often leads to preaching against a nature of sin that can be removed. But removing a nature is a strange way to talk.
      iii. We should follow the example of Wesley who did not try to identify the way sin is transmitted or offer a comprehensive explanation for why all have sinned. Rather, he devoted his teaching to calling people to respond to God’s call and thereby develop habits of holiness.
   c. Unfortunately, the language of “made free from original sin” suggests that Christians have something removed or eradicated. When the Christian commits sin subsequent to the experience of entire sanctification, the temptation is to regard these lapses as “mistakes” not sins. And one wonders why a Christian would voluntarily sin if sanctification frees that Christian from original sin.
8. Offer a doctrine of sanctification that is Trinitarian but not tritheistic. Because…
   a. By this, I do not mean that a full-blown concept of the Trinity must be proposed in article ten. Nor do I mean that each member of the Trinity needs to be mentioned in the article. Nor do I mean that the adjective “Triune” should be placed prior to each mention of God.
   b. Rather, I mean that the doctrine must not single out some aspect of sanctification that is the sole domain of one person of the Trinity. A tritheistic approach sometimes designates redemption to the Son and sanctification to the Spirit. A Trinitarian notion of sanctification assumes that the whole Godhead is present in all aspects of sanctification.
   c. One of the many problems with using language about the baptism of the Holy Spirit is that implies that the third person of the Trinity is responsible for sanctification while the other persons are not.

   a. See above.
   b. While this phrase has legitimate uses, it is much misunderstood. Fighting the battle to rehabilitate the phrase isn’t worth the effort.
   c. The phrase was never used by Wesley. It has been the source of unnecessary wrangling with our Pentecostal sisters and brothers.

STOP FOR DISCUSSION

10. Delete the phrase “different phases” from the paragraph listing various terms of sanctification (e.g., “Christian perfection, perfect love, heart purity, baptism of the Holy Spirit, Christian holiness”).
   a. In today’s English, a “phase” refers to a period of time in a larger sequence, as in “phase one,” “phase two,” etc. My office dictionary offers the following definitions of phase:
      i. A distinct stage of development
      ii. A temporary manner, attitude, or behavior
iii. An aspect or part

None of these definitions fits with the notion that there are many legitimate terms for talking about holiness and sanctification. The way the paragraph is currently formulated, one gets the impression that Christian perfection is the first phase of sanctification, followed by perfect love as the second phase, followed by heart purity as the third phase, etc.

11. Change or drop archaic language such as “devotement” (change to “devotion”) and “wrought” (change to “brought about” or “caused”).

12. Drop the language of entire sanctification as “preceded by entire consecration.”

Because…

a. This language suggests that holiness depends first upon our decision and not first upon God’s work on our behalf. It implicitly denies prevenient grace.

b. It suggests that consecration is not part of sanctification.

13. Use language that affirms the possibility of instantaneous change while simultaneously using language that affirms the possibility of growth in grace.

Because…

a. Reject the language of being “brought into a state” of entire devotement to God. This language is at odds with the growth language in the rest of the paragraph. Being in a state suggests something static; growth in grace suggests something dynamic. While we should affirm that notion that change can happen in an instant, we must find language that does not negate further change.

b. Unfortunately, a whole generation of Nazarenes bought into the fallacy that the Greek aorist tense pertaining to sanctification requires one to believe that sanctification is a one-time event. Most if not all contemporary Nazarene biblical scholars reject this interpretation.
14. Delete the phrase that says that grace can be “ultimately lost.” Because...
   a. It implies that God will eventually give up on sinners.
   b. It contradicts the central biblical notions pertaining to God’s omnipresence and steadfast love.
   c. It suggests that grace is a thing, instead of being God’s loving presence.

15. Understand sanctification primarily in terms of love – God’s love for us and our loving response as we love God, others, and all creation, including ourselves. Because...
   a. What it means to be holy should begin with what we believe God’s holiness entails.
   b. The central claims in Scripture revolve around the claim that God is love and that our proper response to that love is to love God and to love others as ourselves.
   c. We should start the article with a positive statement with regard to holiness as love rather than a negative statement about holiness being a turning from sin – although both the positive and the negative are important.
   d. Our Wesleyan heritage, especially John Wesley, has understood love as the core notion of holiness. “Holiness is the humble, gentle, patient love of God and our neighbor, [and this love] ruling our tempers, words, and actions.” – Wesley
   e. My definition of love: “To love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote well-being.”
   f. Note general categories of love expressions as examples of what love looks like, e.g., “care for the poor and the least of these.”

DISCUSSION