



The Brick and Mortar of Alabaster

(Set up a display in the room where you will have your presentation. It should have a piece of lumber, a brick, a concrete block, and an empty Alabaster box to show the items needed to build an Alabaster church. Attach a piece of paper to each item with the its cost [mentioned later in this article].)

Have you ever thought about what a building is truly made of? In Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, "brick" is defined as "a handy-sized unit of building or paving material typically being rectangular...and of moist clay hardened by heat." Mortar is "a plastic building material (as a mixture of cement, lime, or gypsum plaster with sand and water) that hardens and is used in masonry or plastering."

With several new people in our church, it is always helpful to explain Alabaster and what it means to the Church of the Nazarene.

Background

In 1948, Rev. Elizabeth Venum, Global Council member, was asked to pray about a challenging project for NMI. Rev. Venum knew if God wanted the project to take place, He would provide the plan. God gave her His plan of giving "love" gifts. It was modeled after the sacrifice of the woman who anointed Jesus' head with expensive perfume poured from an alabaster jar, as told in Matthew 26:6-13.

At the 1949 Global NMI Council meeting, Mrs. Venum explained the Alabaster plan. The Council unanimously adopted the plan, and the Board of General Superintendents approved that Alabaster funds to be used exclusively for buildings and properties in cross-cultural ministries. The first offering was received in 1949.

More than 60 years later, Alabaster is still strong, having provided more than 8,300 projects since 1949. Faithful Nazarenes around the world have given more than \$92 million dollars for this much-needed ministry during these 60-plus years.

What is Alabaster?

Our Alabaster Offering provides funds for property and buildings around the world. It gives a sense of permanence, the attitude that the Church of the Nazarene intends to "put down roots." Eighty percent of the money is used in world mission areas, and twenty percent goes to multicultural congregations in the USA/Canada Region. Alabaster funds sometimes help provide land for Work & Witness projects.

One hundred percent of the offering goes toward the construction of churches, schools, medical facilities, and homes for missionaries and national workers.



How Are Alabaster Offerings Received?

The Alabaster Offering gets to the mission field via several avenues. The most widely used is the Alabaster Box, such as this (hold up Alabaster box). Individuals are challenged to regularly contribute the cost of items they desire, but do not need. For instance, this past weekend I wanted a McDonald's sweet tea. It wasn't something I needed, so I put a \$1.00 in my Alabaster box, knowing that money would benefit others. This box also serves as a reminder to pray for those people who will worship, live, learn, and receive medical care in Alabaster buildings.

Who needs an Alabaster box? If you do not have an Alabaster box for your family, please raise your hands and we will get one to you. (Distribute Alabaster boxes. If you have children's Alabaster boxes, encourage the children to raise their hands for their own boxes, as well.)

In February and September, Alabaster Offerings are received. The way an offering is received is as varied as the world areas in which the Church of the Nazarene has a presence; however, it is always accompanied with a spirit of rejoicing. All ages are encouraged to participate; this is an offering for the Lord and His kingdom in which all of us can participate.



Out of Darkness Into the Light

During the ninth district assembly in 2005, the Ethiopia Central District dedicated a new five-story building in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The building was a joint effort of Alabaster funds, Work & Witness, and the support of local churches. The first floor is a worship center, the second floor serves as the district office, the third floor houses educational ministries, the fourth floor accommodates the field offices, and the fifth floor is a conference center for the Horn of Africa Field.

In his dedication speech, missionary Howie Shute described how the training center in the Horn of Africa first came into existence. No one knew how money would be raised for a single-story building; however, God impressed on leaders that they were to build a multi-story training center. The contractor explained that he needed to know how many stories the building would have before the foundation could be dug. Howie Shute said, "Dig it for five floors. But you must clearly understand, when the money runs out, the building stops!" By God's grace, the money didn't run out until the building was completed.

The land on which this facility was built was once home to an abortion clinic. In the place where lives were once taken, now—through Jesus Christ—lives are reborn, transformed by God's grace. Thanks in part to your Alabaster Offering, where darkness once prevailed, now there is light.

Alabaster Project Summary

(Before your Alabaster promotion, make copies of the annual Alabaster Project Summary (www.nazarenemissions.org/10081/story.aspx). Distribute the sheet after the "Out of Darkness" story.)

Now What?

Our church can start building an Alabaster church right now. What will that require?

- It takes brick and mortar.
- It takes dedicated individuals who feel a need to get involved.
- It takes high energy to get the work done.
- It takes motivation and perseverance.
- It takes a heart for the family of God.
- It takes one soul deciding to build the Lord's kingdom brick by brick by brick, and that soul must witness to others in such a way that they too want to get involved.

We can do this! Each of us can help build an Alabaster church this month by participating in the Alabaster Offering. It requires no hidden talents, no massive amounts of money. One only needs a heart for God and love and the mindset of saying, "I can do this. I am only one person, but I can do this. **I will do this!**"

For those of you who have been faithfully filling Alabaster boxes, I commend and thank you. For those of you who just received your Alabaster box and are getting a late start for the offering, I have a challenge and a huge surprise for you.

Tonight, I have hired the very best contractor to help us with an Alabaster building project. (*He/She*) is world-renowned and is only used by the most creative builders in the world. Not many people can afford (*his/her*) talents, but, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, (*he/she*) has offered to do our project for us, free! So, tonight, I introduce to you this very special contractor. (*Name of person*), come on up and show us how we can build an Alabaster church on our own on Alabaster Sunday.

(The "contractor" should be someone chosen in advance and who has become familiar with the rest of the material, because that person will take over the presentation at this point. He/she should be dressed in hard-hat, boots, tool belt, hammer, saw, etc. There should be a dry-erase board up front, so the contractor can draw the building as he/she explains the costs.)



Contractor's Text

I made a special trip across the country to be with you tonight in (*your town and state*). I understand you would like to build your own Alabaster church. Well, let's get started. Let's break down the building process or the brick and mortar and lumber of our building.

(Draws the foundation, the frame, and the bricks as he/she describes the need.)

To assure we have a solid foundation, we will start with concrete. Then, we need to frame our building with lumber. Last, we will lay brick on our building to help firm up the foundation.

We need 50 people who will purchase a foot of concrete for \$2.25 each, 50 people who will purchase a foot of lumber for \$3.00 each, and 50 people who will purchase a brick for \$1.50 each. Just through building *this* Alabaster church by (*date*

for your church's offering), when we will receive the Alabaster Offering, we will raise \$337.50. A person can purchase a brick, a foot of concrete, and a foot of lumber, and it would only cost \$6.75 to help build the Alabaster church. *(The costs or numbers of the concrete, lumber, and bricks can be adjusted to fit your church's Alabaster goal.)*

Now that we have our building laid out in a rough draft, I have some subcontractors who will help me with the next stage.

(Have six people come to the front. Give each of them 25 of either the paper bricks, lumber, or concrete trucks to distribute. As people respond, the "subcontractors" will give one [or more] of the papers, as the people request. The more energy the "subcontractors exhibit [how quickly they move around], the more your audience will stay involved.)

The subcontractors are here to help assure all supplies have been "purchased."

Who believes they can commit to give \$2.25 to represent a foot of concrete for their Alabaster Offering? Please raise your hands, if you are willing to participate. The concrete subcontractors will come to you and hand you a paper concrete truck as a reminder of your commitment.

Which of you feels you can commit to give \$3.00 to represent a foot of lumber for the Alabaster Offering. Please raise your hands if you can give. The lumber subcontractors will hand you a picture of a piece of lumber as a reminder of your commitment this Sunday. Remember, if you are able, you can purchase a brick, a foot of concrete and a foot of lumber; it will only cost \$6.75. Or you can purchase 2 or more of the same item.

Who will commit to give \$1.50 to represent a brick for their Alabaster Offering. Please raise your hands, and the subcontractors will give you a picture of a brick as a reminder.

On (*date*), the day of the church's Alabaster Offering, bring your pieces of paper and your offering. We will have a time of prayer for the people around the world who will benefit from our Alabaster giving, laying the pieces of paper and our offerings on the altar.

Please remember that every time you put money in your Alabaster box, don't think of it as mere currency, think of it as a soul for the Lord's kingdom. Adequate buildings are indispensable to our global missionary advance. By participating in the Alabaster Offering, we build for eternity, realizing that in the same degree we build for them, we build for Him! Compassion is difficult to give away because it keeps coming back.

Alabaster is not giving until it hurts; it is giving until it feels good!

Delilah Johnson
Seymour, Missouri

