

Divine initiative in our service

In whose name and authority do we carry out our mission?

Fr. Hung Nguyen
St. Nicholas Parish, Gig Harbor, WA

Acts of the Apostle 3:1-10

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple area for the three o'clock hour of prayer. And a man crippled from birth was carried and placed at the gate of the temple called "the Beautiful Gate" every day to beg for alms from the people who entered the temple.

When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. But Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." He paid attention to them, expecting to receive something from them. Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, (rise and) walk."

Then Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles grew strong. He leaped up, stood, and walked around, and went into the temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God.

When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the one who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with amazement and astonishment at what had happened to him.

There are many things we can do on our own, but none is more fundamental than carrying out the mission of Jesus as his disciples.

There are many worthy causes we can pursue, but none is more definitive than passing on the name of Jesus that we have born into.

And there are many noble heritages that we have received, but none is more precious than the apostolic succession that authenticates the name and the mission of Jesus in our service.

A brief sketch of apostolic succession:

Jesus → Apostles in union with Peter → Bishops in union with the Pope → Pastors in union with their bishop → ...

Jesus tells the apostles: "go and baptize all nations in God's name." Peter and other apostles went and acted out this commandment in Jesus' name. This tradition is passed on to us nowadays in the Catholic Church. In our profession of faith we say: "We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." This oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolic succession are the way we carry out our mission together.

The role of the pastor in our apostolic succession:

A pastor is the one who is standing in for the bishop in a parish. At his ordination he was asked by the bishop:

"Do you promise to be obedient to me and my successor?"

Because of the affirmative answer, the priest receives the trust and confidence of the bishop to act in his name and authority in a particular parish assignment.

The role of other commissioned group in our apostolic succession:

By the same token, the entire parish and school staffs, councils, commissions, committees and other ministry groups receive the trust and confidence of the pastor to act in his name and authority when they answer “Yes” to their pastor on their commissioning day:

“Are you ready to be faithful to my leadership and that of my successor?”

The authenticity of apostolic succession:

Standing in for someone who commissions us is to put ourselves in the mind-set of that person, to speak in that person’s behalf and carry out that person’s mission. We derive our credibility and authority from that person. In that person’s name and authority we exercise our creative contribution and sincere devotion to the mission assigned.

The commissioning life cycle:

There are 3 stages: Creating → Commissioning → Review →

The first stage – creating: This is the period of discernment and formation. The study of role and responsibility is taken place. By-laws, guidelines, and job description are formulated.

The second stage – commissioning: This period is when action is authorized, mission is carried out, and work is being done.

The third stage – review: This is the period of recess and renewal. Review and evaluation are conducted. Decision on the future of the commissioned group is made.

Why are we here?

Our Communion in Christ

We are here because of our union in spirit, vision, mission, leadership, and service with Christ.

Union in spirit: We profess one Lord, one baptism, one faith. We belong to one body of Christ, initiated into the one Church when we were reborn by water and spirit.

Union in vision: We all seek first the kingdom of God. We all share the learning of this vision in Fr. Hung’s letter “Vision of our Faith Journey.”

Union in mission: We all subscribe to our parish mission statement listed in the front page of our parish bulletin.

Union in leadership: We share the same leadership directed from the pastor. We are in sync with each other through the pastor’s organization.

Union in service: We have various gifts and ministries and we share all of these to support and compliment each others.

In this union, we renounce any other agenda that we might have when we enter into service of the church. Our service is commissioned and authenticated by our pastor. We are here for the sole service of this common union. The joy and reward that we have are in the freedom to advance the reign of God and the service of our brothers and sisters. In seeking God first, we find communion with each other in sharing the mission of Jesus Christ. We can seek doing many other good things that appeal along our paths, but

seeking God first is our first choice and final decision as long as we are commissioned in this role of service. During the commissioned life cycle, we always remember the pastor's invitation and our commitment made on our commissioning day:

1. Are you ready to be faithful to the leadership of your pastor and his successor?
2. Are you ready to joyfully carry out your commissioned assignment?

The critical reference for the theology and the organization of our parish leadership are to be consulted and guided by the Seattle Archdiocese's document 'Many Gifts, One Spirit,' and St. Nicholas' respective vision, mission, by-laws and guidelines.