

Transferring the Authentic Mission and Message of the Church to the Next Generation

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Introduction/Background and Historical Perspective

I appreciate being given the opportunity to talk about the transference of the authentic mission and message of the Church of the Nazarene to the next generation. It is a subject in which I have a great deal of interest for several reasons.

First, the Church of the Nazarene has been a client for the past several years. Developing communication strategies and plans for the church has required us to try and get at its true purpose and identity.

One of the most interesting exercises I go through with pastors and laymen is the one in which I ask them to tell me how they describe the Church of the Nazarene to people who have little or no knowledge of the denomination.

The result of this informal exchange with hundreds of pastors, laymen and some general church leaders helps me to understand why we may be experiencing a breakdown in communication with some people.

The fact is that our ministers and perhaps many of our laymen have a hard time describing in simple ways the Church of the Nazarene and explaining to those who ask: "What do Nazarenes believe?"

I bring up this now as I begin this presentation because our inability to know who we are and what we believe can cause serious problems during the transfer problem.

Our church has a communications problem.

As someone once said, "you cannot teach what you do not know. You cannot give what you do not have."

Secondly, this subject interests me because I'm part of the generation to whom the transfer is currently being made.

Finally, I am at the same time in the process of transferring the Nazarene heritage to another generation, namely my own children. I need to know and understand how best to carry out this responsibility.

Before I get ahead of myself, let's try and gain some perspective on transferring heritage, culture and beliefs to a new group of people. It is a matter of concern for us today.

But historically, the Church of the Nazarene, and other religious and secular organizations as well, have had to deal with the task of conveying to the next generation the heritage, culture and beliefs of the founding fathers.

In preparing for this assignment, I took time to re-read a portion of the book, *Called Unto Holiness* by Dr. Timothy L. Smith and the second volume by the same name, written by Dr. W. T. Purkinser. Let me discuss some things from both volumes.

The transition to a new generation was such important subject that Dr. Smith made an entire chapter out of it. It seems that our church has experienced a number of crises since its inception. These have been in the areas of leadership, identity and organization.

Within 60 days after the 1915 General Assembly, Dr. P. F. Bresee and W.C. Wilson, both general superintendents died. Of the two survivors, E.F. Walker was in failing health and H.F. Renyolds was heavily engaged in the work of foreign missions.

There were problems on several fronts. The one problem that began to concern people the most was the fear of spiritual decline in the second generation.

As Dr. Smith writes, "The church which these new leaders preserved was not quite the same as the one they had inherited." (Nor should it have been.) Dr. Smith adds that change is the essence of history.

Indeed all the problems of this period in the church's history seemed small in comparison to the idea that the faith of the fathers might not outlive the second generation.

This concern also helped to sharpen the focus of what the Church of the Nazarene should be. The church's pioneer leaders had felt their mission to be to preserve a doctrine and a way of life once dominant in older communions from the corrupting effects of social and religious change.

They thought the formation of a specifically holiness denomination in the 1890's was a temporary strategy, necessary only until such time as the larger Christian community was ready to receive the truth again.

There was another factor that contributed to the anxiety of the church. This had to do with the mental struggle over children reared in the church. There were fears that they might water down the faith of their fathers.

Dr. Smith is quick to point out that this fear was quite natural and one that was experienced by other religious organizations as well.

For the Nazarenes, the crisis of the second generation was compounded by many elements: the passing of early leaders; the lag between legal unity and traditions of congregational independence; the fear that children reared in the church would betray its ideals; the reaction to the sudden awakening of standards of personal morality; and the pessimism which the fundamentalist controversy nurtured.

How did the Nazarenes fair in this time of transition?

According to Dr. Smith quite well. From 1921 through 1933, neither modernism nor fundamentalism were able to cloud the denomination's vision of its future, he writes.

This was due in large part to steady and able leadership in the persons of H. Orton Wiley, J.B. Chapman, R.T. Williams, E.J. Fleming, M. Lunn, J.W. Goodwin and J.G. Morrison. It was as if God had raised up a new generation of spiritual and administrative leaders for "such a time as this.

Dr. Smith writes that these men were able to inspire loyalty and enthusiasm in the people and to remain on course.

What can we learn from this brief look at church history?

1. That leadership, vision and communication supported by belief are critical elements in the transfer process.
2. Transfer is on-going
3. That truth survives men.

With this in mind, let's examine the authentic mission and message of the Church of the Nazarene.

What is the Authentic Mission and Message of the Church of the Nazarene?

One of the first rules of discussion is to arrive at an acceptable definition of terms. The words mission and message in the topic I have today are preceded by the adjective "authentic."

Which simply means "being fully trustworthy as according to fact or genuine record."

The mission and message come out of the Church of the Nazarene's "reason to be."

Mission being a task or function assigned or undertaken. Message being a form of communication, either written, oral or by signals.

The church saw its reason for being in the special advocacy of holiness of heart and life.

Writing in the second volume of *Called Unto Holiness*, Dr. Purkiser gives this definition of holiness:

...Holiness, per Wesleyan circles, is the quality of life and spirit that comes from entire sanctification in the two-fold sense of total consecration and complete deliverance from sin, when sin is understood as rebellion in act or attitude against the known will of God.

Dr. Purkiser adds:

...This entire sanctification comes not in the initial commitment of life to Christ in conversion, but as the gift of divine grace in a second epoch in spiritual life.

In its broadest sense, holiness is life under the Lordship of Christ in the fullness of his spirit.

In the forward to the 1985 *Manual*, the Board of General Superintendents writes that the Church of the Nazarene exists to serve as an instrument for advancing the kingdom of God through the preaching and teaching of the gospel throughout the world.

Our well-defined commission, the board continues, is to preserve and propagate Christian holiness as set forth in the Scriptures, through the conversion of sinners, the reclamation of backsliders and the entire sanctification of believers.

Our objective, the statement reads, is a spiritual one, namely to evangelize as a response to the Great Commission of our Lord to "go and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV).

If read carefully the statements I have taken from *Called Unto Holiness* as well as the church *Manual*, there would be little to argue about in terms of the church's mission. The *Manual* makes it clear that our mission comes out of the Great Commission. There are distinctive in the Church of the Nazarene but they too are based on the belief that God wishes for his people to live a holy life and makes it possible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The current statements found in the *Manual* seem to be consistent with the beliefs of the founders.

There may be some who would have misgivings about these statements, but for the most part, I think we would find general agreement with what we have just read.

The real disagreements seem to come in the areas of priorities and leadership style. Questions are raised more at the "how" than "what" or "who."

The current organizational structure lends itself to multiple opinions on what the strategies for evangelism, world mission, Christian education should be.

Peter Drucker says that the customer defines the business. Therefore I think we will see the needs of the marketplace having a stronger impact on the specific directions taken by denominational leaders.

No organization can exist, especially in times when income is declining, without focus. The question becomes: How best to carry out the mission and message of the Church of the Nazarene?

Answering that question is not part of our assignment, but it needs to remain at the forefront of the discussions that take place among church leaders.

It would be easy to stop with the "official" mission statements and say that is what we should pass on. But that is only part of what gets passed on.

In addition to statements of purpose, we have "Articles of Faith" and special rules and guidelines for holy living.

We also have a denominational culture to consider. That culture is the basic pattern of shared beliefs, behaviors and assumptions acquired over time by members of the denomination.

Three things to remember about culture:

1. Culture has patterns. Patterns of beliefs, behaviors and assumptions serve as a predictable guide to appropriate behavior on an individual and group level.
2. Culture is shared by members of an organization. Culture provides cohesiveness among people throughout an organization.
3. Culture is developed over time as a result of past successes.

The Church of the Nazarene's culture gets passed on as well. It becomes part of the package. Why this has happened, I cannot say for sure. It is fair to conclude that the message of holiness has been subject to some rather extreme interpretations.

In the desire to protect the church against outside influences and to hold the standards high, certain well intentioned people planted the seeds of discontent in a succeeding generation.

To some, the "what" of holiness became more important than the "who."

Too many learned too late that holiness is not the way to Jesus Christ. Rather Jesus Christ is the way to holiness.

If you study the history of the holiness movement in the United States, you can understand better why it has had a P.R. problem. At its core there is a beauty that reflects the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.

But at the extremes, there was established a negative identity of this wonderful message of full salvation. It proved to be a turn-off to a large number of our own people as well as those on the outside looking in.

Many who knew the church but not the Nazarene found themselves unable or unwilling to live up to the standard that some may have set too high.

It is indeed a great tragedy that we have had at times such a distortion of a beautiful message.

Dr. Hugh Benner, in one of his last editorials in the *Herald of Holiness* stated his concern that along the way we have made some mistakes that have caused us to lose many of our own sons and daughters.

It is fair to say that the authentic message has not always gotten through.

Dr. Purkiser talks about this situation in "Called Unto Holiness," Volume II.

He states

...The Church of the Nazarene is totally committed to the holiness message with its inherent potential for spiritual renewal. It is a message that is being purified from some of the more extreme interpretations that have at times been given.

The tendency of folk theology to confuse ideals with standards, to ignore the human elements in the sanctified life, and to expect in the epoch of entire sanctification that measure of sanctity that comes with Christian maturity is gradually being corrected.

Now we have several things which could be passed on:

- authentic mission statement
- Articles of Faith
- Nazarene culture and tradition

Is there a way to summarize our mission and message in order that people who really aren't into theology and doctrine can understand?

On a Ministers Tape Club message in 1987, General Superintendent John A. Knight talked about transferring the heritage of the Church of the Nazarene to a new generation.

"What is that heritage?", he asked.

Dr. Knight listed seven things that, in his opinion, comprised the Nazarene heritage:

1. Loyalty to the Word of God
2. Emphasis on entire sanctification
3. Strong biblical preaching
4. Spontaneity of singing and praise
5. The necessity of the superintendency
6. The disciplined life
7. Our emphasis on evangelism and mission

We may not mind these at the same levels of intensity everywhere. But they do give us an idea as to what one general superintendent feels is important and should be transferred.

These points may be just one person's opinion of the components to our heritage. However, it does help when leaders at least identify what things they believe are important to our church. What leaders say has influence over others within the church. Which is another reason that leaders should be careful what they say.

Any message that is biblically based must remain the same over time. But there needs to be a certain amount of flexibility in our communication strategy. It needs to have a market bias.

What is said to the minister at PALCON can afford to have more theological detail than what is said to the first time visitor.

One of the most important tasks that we face as communicators is to get at the essence of our message. And to speak in a way that people will hear and understand.

Time is the critical factor. There's not a lot of it to go around today. People want us to get to the point. This may be an unreasonable request in light of the fact that the transfer of a mission and message takes some time.

We are learning through research what new people are interested in knowing about the Church of the Nazarene. In a series of focus groups that we have just completed we discovered that people who come to our church from other denominations make judgements based more on worship style.

Comparisons are quickly made between Nazarene services and that of the Baptist church they used to attend.

We know in marketing that positioning takes place not in a vacuum but in relationships to the strengths and weaknesses of the competition.

So our initial findings support this general premise.

On the other hand the unchurched (those who have not attended church regularly for the past year or so) seem to want to know immediately, what do Nazarenes believe?

I think that I have come across a succinct answer to that question. I discovered it while visiting the Wesley Chapel and Museum in London last summer.

Some creative time had obviously been spent some time studying the preaching and writing of John Wesley and because of the limitations of time and space, came up with these statements.

Four things were given:

Good News For All

In the 18th century many Christians believed that some were predestined to heaven, while others were predestined to hell. Some people were able to respond to God's love in Jesus Christ, while others were not.

We believe that all people may be saved through faith in Christ. No one, whoever they are, whatever they have done, is beyond the reach of God's salvation.

Assurance For All

Not only might all people be saved through faith in Christ: we believe that all might have the inward assurance of this salvation.

Holiness For All

We believe that the call to holiness was not to a few select souls, but for all God's people. To everyone there is a call to live a holy life.

Holiness means not just the absence of outward sins, but the very removal of the root of sin within the human heart and its replacement by the spirit of love.

Concern For All

We believe that a persons faith should be practical. All of us need to be concerned for people's bodies and minds as well of their souls. We continue this Gospel concern for all aspects of life — it cannot be confided to purely personal salvation or private devotion.

In bringing people to eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, we have to care for their earthly life and conditions.

It can be summed up like this...

All need to be saved.

All may be saved.

All may know themselves saved.

All may be saved to the uttermost.

By Grace, through faith.

This may not answer all the questions that people have about what Nazarenes believe, but it does appear to get to the heart of our message in a balanced way.

We are also trying through a coordinated effort to say that "our church can be your home." Having identified some of the things people said were important to them about the Church of the Nazarene, we are attempting to create an attitude and invitation of "Welcome" to the people who are looking for a church home.

How Do We Transfer the Authentic Mission and Message?

Before attempting to answer this question, I would like to pose another.

Who is responsible for the transfer?

The answer is three-fold.

First, leadership has the responsibility to do just what the name implies, lead. As is related to the transfer to a new generation, the initial but not final responsibility belongs to church leadership.

Who is in this first group?

The Board of General Superintendents, District Superintendents, Pastors, Denominational executives, most of whom are ordained elders.

Next, we have lay leadership. Those who serve on church boards and committees. Those who teach Sunday school. those people who really make things happen week in and week out.

An overlooked segment of the church that has a tremendous influence on future generations and their attitudes and beliefs is the faculty, staff and administrations of all our graduate, undergraduate, and bible colleges.

On a daily basis for nearly four years, students have a great amount of exposure to these people. Weight this with the fact that young adults are to a degree still in their, good and bad these groups can have on the future of the denomination.

No wonder the Southern Baptists fight so hard over control of the committees that oversee their colleges and seminaries. They have come to realize that professors may not have much authority they do have tremendous influence on future generations.

Finally, anyone who is a member of the Church has a responsibility to help with the transfer to the next generation. Anyone who believes in what the church stands for and has sacrificed to see it move forward must do what they can to see that the torch is successfully passed on.

The transfer process occurs over time.

This is why what we do day in and day out means so much. It's not any one big thing that we do. Rather it is a series of words spoken and deeds done to our families and others that speaks volumes to the next generation.

It points out the need to walk with God daily. To pattern out life after the life of Christ.

Leadership today involves influencing others. Authoritative, dogmatic approaches to people and their problems will not get very far. What does work is having a steady, positive influence over long periods of time.

The matter of holiness ethics is something that is of concern to me. Treating one another with high ethical standards goes a long way in reinforcing what we preach and teach.

Another key factor in the transfer process is our own interpretation of the authentic mission and message. As we mentioned previously, there are many parts to the mission and message and it is not possible to carry all of them out.

Some would say that holiness has two dimensions, personal and social. If this is true and I believe it is, then we need to work toward a proper balance between the two as an individual and a church.

Chances are we will give emphasis to certain areas that we have been taught are important. This learning has probably taken place over the years under the guidance of our parents, teachers, ministers, missionaries, and evangelists.

There are some basic ways in which transfer takes place. I would like to identify them.

Transfer takes place by:

1. Deliberate role modeling.
2. Oral and written communication.
3. Structure.
4. The way power and status is defined.
5. What is measured and controlled.
6. How people respond to crisis.
7. Observation of unintended behavior.
8. The reward system.
9. Stories, legends, myths, rituals and symbols.
10. Design and use of physical facilities.

It is important to remember that in the transfer process, people matter more than words on paper.

Ernest Fremont Tittle, in his book, *Jesus after 19 Centuries*, has this to say:

"Whenever ideas are taken seriously, there is a reason, and the reason is that somebody has staked everything on the truth and worth of them and has in his own person incarnated them.

Tittle quotes George Eliot who says, "ideas are often poor ghosts; out sunfilled eyes cannot discern them...but sometimes they are made flesh. They breathe upon us with warm breath; they are clothed in a living human soul;...then their presence is power."

Tittle concludes:

"Always and everywhere it is not disembodied ideas, it is not abstract principles, it is personality that moves the world."

Summary

The scope of this assignment does not permit me to cover all areas that need to be addressed. In summary it is important that we mention some key sociological factors involved in the transfer process:

To improve the effectiveness of the transfer, it would be helpful if leadership knew as much as possible about the values of the next generation.

The "illusion of knowledge" is what leaders face when they operate on the basis of assumptions and not facts.

Leaders do not necessarily need more information. They need insight and understanding.

2. The next generation of Nazarenes, some of whom are already working their way into positions of leadership and authority are different than their parents.

Studies conducted by Dr. Quinn Mills at the Harvard Business School and reported in his latest book, "Not Like Our Parents," indicate that while the baby boom generation is as varied in many ways as preceding generations, they are less likely to be supportive of institutions.

Their concern centers around themselves and their families (although this may lead to a renewed interest in certain kinds of institutions).

They appear to be ready to commit themselves to a cause but not to an organization.

3. The baby busters, those born after 1964, are different than the boomers. They too value hard work and their own pursuits but are willing to give up cash and advancement to lead a balanced life.

They are also being told by corporations not to count on the company taking care of them for the rest of their lives. Therefore their trust will tend to be in themselves and not institutions.

5. While some general church leaders have expressed concern about church planting and evangelism possibly diluting the purity of the message and opening up the denomination to unwanted influences, their concern may be somewhat misplaced.

The excitement about the authentic mission and message of the Church of the Nazarene, the interest in our colleges, camps, and outreach efforts comes not from the existing members.

Rather, the interest and excitement in the church will come from its new converts. Previously unchurched people feel as though the Church of the Nazarene has a lot to offer.

We make a serious error when we think our traditions and heritage as completed things that require defense and maintenance only.

Alan Kantrow, in his book, "The Constraints of Corporate Tradition," states:

"Institutions that remain vital over time know how to live in time, know how to possess the past by gradually redefining their own relation to it. What they — and we — possess through tradition is something that we and they can help shape.

There is currently a changing of the guard taking place in the Church of the Nazarene. What all of us must come to realize, however, is that we can do our best in the transfer process, but there comes a time when we simply must let go.

Those who would hold on too tightly to the authentic mission, message and organizational authority deny to succeeding generations the possibilities of taking the church to even greater heights.

It's true, no leader wants to see his church go down on his watch. But it is not his church. The church in the truest sense belongs to God. We certainly need to be good stewards with what He has provided. But God is the ultimate strategist and He will find a way to fulfill His purpose.

God has blessed the Church of the Nazarene. And He will continue to do so as long as it is obedient and faithful to His mission and His message.

Peter Drucker says that we know only two things about the future:

- It cannot be known.
- It will be different from what exists now and from what we now expect.

But precisely because the future is going to be different and cannot be predicted, it is possible to make the unexpected and unpredicted come to pass.

The purpose of the work on making the future is not to decide what should be done tomorrow, but what should be done today to have a tomorrow.

To that end may God once again raise up capable leaders, holy men of faith to lead us and direct us and inspire us to do great things for Him in the advancement of His kingdom.