

Campus Ministry's Mission to Serve Catholic Higher Education

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Abstract

Campus ministry contributes to the development of mission and Catholic identity at Catholic colleges and universities through student programming and pastoral care, and also through service to the institution itself. It is important to recognize that while campus ministry is not solely responsible for the outward expressions of Catholic identity, it can serve as a catalyst for mission development. Campus ministry can accomplish this by encouraging campus-wide collaboration and interdisciplinary discussion, and by articulating Catholic values that can undergird university policy and practice. Such actions can reinforce the values highlighted in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

College students have a spiritual hunger. Mike Hayes, author of *Googling God: The Religious Landscape of People in their 20's and 30's*, and managing editor of the popular Catholic young adult website "bustedhalo.com",¹ characterizes the religious and faith experiences of a selection of Catholic young adults in the following way:

Indeed, young adults of all kinds are on a search for answers. In a sense, they are [in Karl Rahner's words] 'infinite questioners' in life. As they come into further knowledge they simply ask more questions. New answers often lead to more questions, and what we presume as clarities almost always trail off as obscurities with further knowledge. We never have full certainty. Thus, we often rely on faith to provide those unanswerable questions with a satisfactory or a certain answer.²

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¹ Mike Hayes, *Googling God: the Religious Landscape of People in Their 20s and 30s* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2007).

² *Ibid.*, 140.

Hayes's observations regarding the uniqueness of the young adult faith journey and the intensity of their search for meaning echoes the research of Sharon Parks, who names the search for meaning as a primary developmental task among college students and young adults.³ Smith and Denton observe that, despite this longing, spiritual expression among today's college students wanes in later teen years, especially among Catholics.⁴ Furthermore, upon critical review of the methodological landscape within American higher education and the developmental process of the college experience, Parks also reasons that even though many students hunger for deepened expressions of the spiritual life, they do not find guidance from their academic mentors as they seek to satiate this hunger.⁵ Recent surveys on spirituality in higher education report current data that support these conclusions. For instance:

A national survey of entering college freshmen in 2004 found that most came to college with a goal to grow spiritually. A follow-up survey of students at the end of their junior year ... suggests that while attendance at religious services sharply declines during college, students do in fact significantly progress along their spiritual quests throughout their first three years—but often without the help of their professors, who most students say never encourage discussions of religious or spiritual matters.⁶

The reality that many students come to college seeking spiritual and religious growth and fail to find mentors who encourage this growth poses great challenges for Catholic universities. This is also true for those schools that express missions that encourage seekers in their search for truth and meaning in life, and whose religious affiliation provides the foundational principles upon which students and graduates are influenced to live.

There are many examples of Catholic universities that have missions illustrating a commitment to the search for truth and meaning. For example, a portion of the mission at the University of Notre Dame states: "Notre Dame's character as a Catholic academic community

³ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), p.5-7.

⁴ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 194.

⁵ Parks, 161-62.

⁶ Elizabeth Redden, "More Spiritual, But Not in Church," *Inside Higher Ed*. December 18, 2007. <http://insidehighered.com/news/2007/12/18/spirituality>. The complete survey, "Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study on College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose," Available at <http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu/>.

presupposes that no genuine search for the truth in the human or the cosmic order is alien to the life of faith.”⁷ Similarly, the University of Dayton grounds its mission in the search for truth and its relationship to God’s work in the world: “As Catholic, the University commits itself to a distinctive vision of learning and scholarship that includes: a common search for truth based on the belief that truth can be more fully known and is ultimately one; a respect for the dignity of each human person created in the image and likeness of God; and an appreciation that God is manifested sacramentally through creation and the ordinary things in life.”⁸ Bellarmine University also emphasizes the themes in its mission: “Bellarmine insists that its students become more fully aware of an inner cosmos of ultimate questions and an external world laden with issues and needs of great social and ethical complexity.”⁹ Finally, Creighton University names similar commitments: “Creighton exists for students and learning. Members of the Creighton community are challenged to reflect on transcendent values, including their relationship with God, in an atmosphere of freedom of inquiry, belief and religious worship.”¹⁰ Clearly, Catholic higher education is committed to influencing students in their search for meaning.

Current student attitudes and experiences pose methodological challenges to this commitment as universities attempt to strengthen their dedication to Catholic ideals. These ideals form a foundation for the quest among students as they struggle with their lives of faith. This reality also poses great challenges to campus ministry, especially in its concern for student spiritual development and in its commitment to the expression of Catholicism on campus.

At this point we will examine the role of campus ministry with respect to mission and Catholic identity in Catholic higher education. This discussion will focus on three aspects: (1) What is a mission within a Catholic college or university? (2) How can campus ministry support that mission? and (3) What role does campus ministry play in giving that mission renewed meaning and direction? We will also answer how campus ministers contribute to the expression and development of mission

⁷ Cf. Notre Dame University. “Mission statement,” <http://www.nd.edu/aboutnd/mission-statement/>

⁸ Cf. University of Dayton. “Mission statement,” http://diversitysearch.udayton.edu/university/ud_mission.pdf

⁹ Cf. Bellarmine University. “Mission statement,” <http://www.bellarmino.edu/about/mission.asp>

¹⁰ Cf. Creighton University. “Mission statement,” <http://www.creighton.edu/mission>

in a Catholic university and how campus realities affect expectations for those who work in campus ministry.

What is a Mission within a Catholic College or University?

Although long used throughout the Church's history, the word "mission" has been adapted to a variety of secular applications. Major corporations influence consumerism and culture specifically through creative focus and application of their missions. Note the mission statements of three strong American corporations, Apple, Walt Disney Company, and Wal-Mart:

- **Apple** is committed to bringing the best personal computing experience to students, educators, creative professionals and consumers around the world through its innovative hardware, software, and Internet offerings.¹¹
- The mission of the **Walt Disney Company** is to be one of the world's leading producers and providers of entertainment and information. Using our portfolio of brands to differentiate our content, services, and consumer products, we seek to develop the most creative, innovative and profitable entertainment experiences and related products in the world.¹²
- In everything we do, **Wal-Mart** is driven by a common mission: Saving people money so they can live better.¹³

All of these mission statements use language that resonates with religious or ethical overtones, utilizing words and phrases like "commitment," "service," and "saving." They also claim to transcend the ordinary with phrases such as: "the best," "one of the world's leading producers and providers," "the most creative," and "in everything." Notice, too, that each of these mission statements links two realities: imagination and people. Perhaps the plaque outside the Disney Company expresses it best: "Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow and fantasy."¹⁴

"Mission" is a cultural term that can be ambiguous: highly secular in its intentionality, but deeply religious in its language and symbols.

¹¹ Apple Inc. "HP and Apple Partner to Deliver Digital Music Player and iTunes to HP Customers," <http://www.apple.com/pr/library/2004/jan/08hp.html>

¹² Disney Co. "Careers," <http://corporate.disney.go.com/careers/who.html>

¹³ Wal-Mart stores. "About us," <http://walmartstores.com/AboutUs/8123.aspx>

¹⁴ Gary Gentile, "Disneyland Still Bringing Magic to Millions," MSNBC.com. July 15, 2005. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8575641/>

A mission statement expresses the vision of an organization and the way the organization implements that vision. Those of us who work to further the appropriation of the Catholic mission in higher education are sometimes suspicious of efforts to brand or to market our mission. But, the reality is that we are simply infiltrating secular territory and reclaiming some of our own religious property, e.g., values, ideals, creativity, human happiness, and the desire to help other people live lives of dignity, purpose, and meaning. Indeed, what experts in marketing and branding bring to their trade might be called *zeal*; that is, an energy that promotes something that they believe people ought to have, to do, or to embrace. This is the ambiguous cultural context of mission today. With attempts to express university mission as nothing less than the mission of the Church within the context of higher education, there is cultural competition for attention, loyalty, and commitment. Thus, it is also a challenge.

In the recent study entitled *Catholic Higher Education, A Culture in Crisis*, the authors apply this challenge to the specifically Roman Catholic culture of our institutions.¹⁵ They note:

There is no single way for a Catholic college or university to understand and actualize its Catholic mission. How mission is understood and implemented, however, will be greatly affected by the culture from which it emerges and the depth and breadth of the Catholic character of that culture. Culture is the medium from which organizational identity grows and mission flows.¹⁶

The authors develop four models to describe how mission operates within the system of Catholic higher education. These include immersion, persuasion, diaspora, and cohort models.

- In the *Immersion Model* the vast majority of students, faculty, and administrators are Roman Catholic. Academic curriculum includes a broad array of courses exploring the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and a very strong co-curricular Catholic culture is operative.
- *Persuasion Model* schools have a Catholic majority among students, faculty, staff, and administrators. A small array of courses are taught from the Catholic perspective and a strong nonacademic Catholic culture is present on campus.
- In the *Diaspora Model* a minority of students and only a few faculty

¹⁵ Melanie Morey and John Piderit, S.J., *Catholic Higher Education, A Culture in Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

and administrators are Catholic. Only a minimal number of Catholic courses are offered. These are supported by a consistent Catholic culture in the nonacademic areas.

- Finally, the *Cohort Model* boasts a small cohort of well-trained and committed Catholic students and faculty with a view toward influencing policy, and a much larger group of students educated to be sensitive to religious issues.

These models of mission orientation in Catholic higher education illustrate a wide range in the expression of Catholicism in the academic sector, campus Catholic culture, and student, faculty/staff, and administration identity and commitment. This expression affects development and practical application of mission-oriented programming. For example, consider structuring a faculty/staff mission formation program in a higher education community that is dominantly Roman Catholic. Contrast this with a program for a community in which Catholicism is a minor influence within a culture that has become indifferent to any explicitly religious reflection or discussion. Program goals and methodology will differ in each case, as each institution understands and implements its mission differently. Also different will be campus-wide sensitivity to areas that demand attention and development from a mission perspective. These include development of courses, degree programs, policies, hiring practices, co-curricular activities, and other university functions that reflect some commitment to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and religious culture that can be operative on campus.

Depending on the functioning model of mission incorporation, campus ministry on Catholic campuses also differs in the breadth, depth, type of activity, and influence it has in student life and institutional mission development. For example, campus ministers on an *immersion* model campus might offer substantive, catechetically-based mini-courses or retreats for students interested in furthering their understanding and practice of Catholicism; campus ministers on a *cohort* model campus might use a less catechetical approach to ministry, favoring opportunities to learn about and reflect upon the contributions and experiences of students from a variety of religious backgrounds.

How Can Campus Ministry Support the Mission of a Catholic University or College?

In 1985, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the pastoral letter, *Empowered by the Spirit*, to express the

mission of campus ministry in higher education.¹⁷ Through campus ministry, “the Church brings to the dialogue with higher education its general mission to preach the Gospel of Christ and to help the human family achieve its destiny.”¹⁸ To this end, campus ministry in a Catholic college or university presents the call of Jesus Christ to His followers, and teaches students to work together to integrate Christian vision and values into their lives, both as students and future professionals.

There is a rich tradition that narrates and illustrates these values. One gospel narrative in particular, the parable of the Good Samaritan,¹⁹ effectively illustrates the vision and values of Christ and presents these explicitly as a call, a mission. The narrative is familiar. Challenged by a lawyer to identify who is his neighbor, Jesus does not define or argue. He tells a story of a lone traveler accosted by robbers who leave the traveler, beaten and unconscious, on the road. A priest and a Levite arrive on the scene—representative of organized religious tradition—and notice the victim, but pass by. Then a Samaritan comes, representative of a despised people. He performs four actions that represent, for Jesus, the making of the neighbor. The sequence of these actions constitute the heart of campus ministry: the Samaritan sees; he is deeply touched with compassion because of the condition of the traveler on the road; he does what good he can with the resources available to him; and finally, the Samaritan enlists the aid of the innkeeper, to sustain, in his absence, the good he has initiated. These four movements also represent the ethical and religious values that distinguish the priorities of the gospel and the role and work of campus ministry within Catholic higher education.

To See

To see is not merely physical seeing but interpersonal engagement with reality. There is a constant gospel theme that dramatizes the need to see the poor and the helpless, the marginalized and the outsider, the foreigner and the blind, the deaf and the mute, the landless and the widow, the orphan and the sinner, the helpless and hopeless. It is this seeing that molded the humanity of Jesus; He spoke with power and authority, because He saw. It is Christ's intention to share this contemplative, dimensional, interpersonal seeing with His disciples through the work of the Spirit.

¹⁷ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Empowered by the Spirit: Campus Ministry Faces the Future* (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1985).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 17.

¹⁹ Luke 10:25-37.

To Feel Compassion

To feel compassion is to give birth to the union that binds the human family together; to identify from the heart, that seat of affective knowledge which was sacred space for the Jew. It is a powerful emotional identification that impels us toward bonding and leads to action. Again, it is the impulse of grace that moves Jesus to give sight, to ease the heart, to proclaim his mission in these words, “Come to me, all you that are weary and that are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”²⁰

To Act

The Good Samaritan’s actions transformed his compassion into an effective remedy. By interrupting his journey, pouring on the wine of disinfectant and the oil of balm, tearing his own clothing to make strips of bandages for the victim’s wounds, and spending time and money, he became an active agent who brought justice where there had been injustice. The Samaritan is that true disciple who not only hears the word of God, but also *does* the word of God.

To Sustain the Good

Finally, to enlist the aid of the inauspicious innkeeper into his conspiracy of care, the Samaritan uses money and the promise of his return; “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.”²¹ This final action of the Samaritan is the generative thrust of every truly effective good deed: it engages the community, the generations yet to come, and it moves, like the Spirit, beyond itself into times and places unimagined. It sustains the good action. “Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow and fantasy.”²² The Samaritan speaks for Christ, inviting both the lawyer and His disciples to enter into the world of God’s creative design, where we were made to live in harmony and peace with all creation—our eternal “yesterday.” Christ invites us to enter the world of tomorrow, the new age, when God will wipe each tear from every human eye. We are invited

²⁰ Mt 11:28.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Gentile, “Disneyland.”

to the world of fantasy—not to escape, but, through the lens of ethical and religious imagination, to enter where the kingdom is not an imposition of force but a world of prophets, poets, artists, scientists, teachers, and learners who believe that education of head and heart can create a world more just, more peaceful, and more human.

Campus ministers, then, have a profound task. First of being those who see, who witness and respond with the power of compassion; then of being those who act with commitment, who sustain the good by enlisting others into the graced trade being a disciple, and making the Lord present to His people. For finally, the last words of this gospel scene confront and challenge us: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? He said: The one who showed him mercy. Jesus said to him: Go and do likewise.”²³

Seeing, feeling compassion, responding with good deeds, and engaging the community are tasks worthy of all who work with young adults in higher education, not just campus ministers. Campus ministry's uniqueness lies in how these actions are integrated with the charge from *Empowered by the Spirit*²⁴. Campus ministry is a mission of the Church in dialogue with higher education. Beyond pastoral care of students, campus ministers focus on the religious aspects of mission implementation as an expression of the Church's presence on campus. Besides vowed religious, whose work extends into all realms of the university, campus ministers are arguably some of the only other campus personnel who see themselves in service to the university *and* to the Church. Through their activities then, they bring a unique presence and perspective to Catholic higher education. This presence includes but is not limited to: leadership in public religious expression through prayer and worship; a focus on faith and spiritual formation as essential to the development of the whole person; a faith-based perspective on service and justice that reaches beyond secular humanism to grasp a commitment to discipleship; reverence for the faith experiences of faculty, staff, and students who support the Catholic mission yet are grounded personally in other religious perspectives; and (typically in collaboration with theologian colleagues) an ability to contribute to dialogue that can apply Church teaching to issues in higher education through policies, position statements, and guiding operative principles. These four actions: seeing, feeling compassion, responding with good deeds, and engaging

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ USCCB, *Empowered by the Spirit*.

the community, are operative in campus ministry's influence in higher education.

The Role of Campus Ministry in Giving Renewed Meaning and Direction to Mission

Catholic higher education frequently relies on campus ministers to shoulder expressions of the school's Catholic identity. As a result, Catholic identity can easily be seen as a co-curricular activity evidenced in traditional pastoral care and faith formation activities (e.g., retreats, service, and worship) rather than something that is integral to curriculum, methods of research and instruction, recruitment, policy development, and more. In a time of increasing demands and more intensive competition for bright students and effective faculty, administrators can become preoccupied with financial survival and institutional development. Too often, faculty sees its task primarily in terms of research, teaching, and departmental obligations. Student development professionals share concerns with campus ministers, but frequently translate these into terms of residence-hall policies, psycho-sexual development or mal-development, and student behavioral issues. Another challenge is that many campus professionals lack theological understanding to apply creative methodologies of their own disciplines to circumstances that could improve expression of Catholic identity and effectively witness to the Catholic character and mission of the university. In addition, one could note that there is not always agreement among faculty, staff, and administrators regarding what being committed to Catholic identity on campus really means in the context of each particular institution, department, course, or policy.

Campus ministry can be isolated in attempts to promote the specifically religious/spiritual mission of the Catholic college or university and, even more discouraging, ill-equipped and under-resourced to do what they know the mission demands. When commitment to mission and Catholic identity is represented only by the work of campus ministers, the result will likely be inadequate in scope and depth—not because the campus ministers fail to provide solid guidance, but because the school often fails to recognize that mission implementation expands beyond the realm of the campus minister's influence and expertise. Even in those institutions, which have designated personnel specifically for mission work (e.g., Vice President for Mission and Identity, or Assistant to the President for Mission and Identity, or Mission Facilitator), it is important to remember that these positions provide institutional focus

and oversight, but not total responsibility. Ideally, all—faculty, administrators, trustees, student affairs personnel, and staff—are responsible for expressing the mission of the institution: to bring the wisdom of the Church into dialogue with the culture of learning and formation. This constitutes the corporate vocation of the Catholic college or university.

Whatever the ideal, campus ministry does have a unique role in contributing to that function of the university which integrates “religious and moral principles with their academic study and nonacademic activities, thus integrating faith with life.”²⁵ And as *Ex corde Ecclesiae* continues, “[Pastoral ministry] is part of the mission of the Church within the university, and is also a constitutive element of a Catholic university itself, both in its structure and its life. A university community concerned with promoting the institution’s Catholic character will be conscious of this pastoral dimension and sensitive to the ways in which it can have an influence on all university activities.”²⁶ Consequently, the campus minister’s prophetic role within the university community is to call attention to the integration of values, which is an essential and unique function of the Catholic college or university: to bring human culture into dialogue with the wisdom of revelation.

This concern for the integration of culture and values has been articulated by many educators outside the Catholic tradition. It is an educational issue, not just a religious issue. For example, Anthony Kronman, Sterling Professor of Law at the Yale Law School and for ten years its Dean, has written a cogent argument for a return to values-based education. His introductory chapter states the issues.

In what sense, and in what way, can the question of what living is for be made an appropriate and useful subject of academic instruction? Today, in most of our colleges and universities, it is not, in fact, a subject of organized study, and one might infer from what I have said that this is because the question by its very nature precludes it—that it is too personal to be studied in this way. But the question of life’s meaning has not always been neglected as it is now. Once upon a time, and not all that long ago, many college and university teachers, especially in the humanities, believed that they had a responsibility to lead their students in an organized examination of this question and felt confident in their authority to do so. They recognized that each student’s answer must be his or her own but believed that a disciplined survey of the answers the greatest writers and artists of the past have given to us can be a helpful aid to students in their own personal encounter with the question of what living is

²⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae: On Catholic Universities* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1990), no. 38.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

for—indeed, an indispensable aid, without which they must face the question not only alone but in disarray.²⁷

Catholic colleges and universities continue to frame questions about the meaning of life in the Word of God, based on centuries of reflection from the great minds and hearts of the Church, as they provide guidance to young minds and hearts in their search for meaning. However, such exploration can easily become a marginal aspect of the work of Catholic colleges and universities unless they remain faithful to a Catholic perspective in the search for truth, and the integration of faith and reason. Important also are active review of hiring and promotion, policy and curriculum development, ritual celebration, and board education on its responsibility for mission oversight.

While serving students in traditional pastoral capacities is an indispensable aspect of campus ministry, campus ministers are also challenged to serve the development and expression of mission in Catholic higher education. Although the charge for leadership in mission development lies first with the president, trustees, provost, and other top-level administrators, “campus ministers must go beyond the ministry to faculty and students to address the institution itself. Campus ministry must not allow the legitimate boundaries of pastoral care to set the boundaries of its ministry.”²⁸

Utilizing the same actions expressed by Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan, campus ministers can serve as catalysts for interdisciplinary discussion of mission integration and articulation, thereby resisting some natural tendencies in Catholic higher education to “ghettoize” Catholic identity in ministry activities. Campus ministers often see opportunities to fine tune expression of Catholic identity across the university. Because of their *compassionate commitment* to serve the mission of the Church and build the kingdom of God, *they act in collaboration with others* to foster dialogue that tackles difficult issues. The result can be development of expressions of Catholic identity that *serve the goodness* of the Church’s mission as it is uniquely expressed in their particular institution. Campus ministers, with other university professionals, can serve as key collaborators to develop language, understanding, and commitment to the Catholic mission of the institution. In this way, communities of “disciples” engage across the university.

²⁷ Anthony Kronan, *Education’s End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given up on the Meaning of Life* (New Haven. Yale University Press, 2007), 35.

²⁸ Richard R. Gaillardetz, “Campus Ministry’s Mission to Address the University Itself.” *Origins*, 32(31): (Jan 16, 2003): 512.

These can advance outward expression of and inward commitment to, the Catholic mission of the university.

What implications does this have for mission and identity at Catholic universities today? There is a great need at many Catholic universities for discussions about how campus ministry can be positioned more effectively to promote Catholic mission and identity. While issues, structures, and resulting solutions will be unique to each campus, universities should call upon the resources of campus ministers in Catholic identity development and planning. However, having campus ministers as token members of committees to offer the “Catholic” perspective is a widespread practice that needs to be examined, and replaced by a new model of collaborative responsibility for mission integration. Additionally, the university, as a whole, must be educated regarding the campus ministry’s mission to broaden the understanding of its role in pastoral care, faith formation, and service to the university itself. This is especially true in places where those who oversee the work of campus ministers are unfamiliar with the mission, methods, perspectives, and important contributions this ministry makes to student development and institutional identity. Finally, education and training for campus ministers should include preparation that familiarizes them with operational structures and processes of Catholic universities. Indeed, the vision presented here cannot be fully realized without investing in the formation of campus ministers as higher education professionals as well as pastoral ministers and teachers of the faith.

In effect, the role of campus ministers is three-fold: to proclaim the fundamental spiritual dignity of every student; to challenge that student to live a life reflective of the story of the Good Samaritan; and to insist that this same summons, “to go and do likewise,” be placed before the rest of the academic community. Campus ministers are the Samaritan who stops to see, who feels compassion, who does the good that can be done with available resources, but especially, who finds ways to engage others in all areas of university life in this mission that forms minds, hearts and spirits for a more just, peaceful, and loving world. This is no small vocation. Nor is it peripheral to the distinctive mission of Catholic higher education today. This mission calls us not only to educate the mind and heart, but also the soul. In effective campus ministry this mission of soul-education with students, faculty, staff, administration—and Catholic higher education itself—must be modeled, and demands to be proclaimed.

