



What's in a Name?

Papal transitions have two points of public anticipation: first, who it will be, and then, what name will that person choose.

The point of taking on a new name is to subsume one's personal identity to a set of values that the new leader hopes to embody which have already been personified by another. And so Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio is now Pope Francis. He is the first to choose that appellation, in recognition of Francis of Assisi, who unassumingly served among the poor and cared for God's creation.

Choosing a name as a statement of values seems to me to be a profound spiritual exercise. Indeed, it started me thinking about what name I might choose from among those whose convictions I could only hope to emulate. I jotted down a few. Then a few more. Then dozens more as I reflected on how blessed I have been to be influenced by so many gifted and godly people.

Here are just some of the names I would have considered had the Vatican called:

Pope Gary the Other. This is for Gary Cope-land, who was my first pastor when I came to faith as a high-school student in a brand new Covenant church. He not only disciplined me, he entrusted me with service opportunities. It reminds me that kingdom impact comes as we influence others who in turn may go on to have an influence of their own. This name becomes an aspiration to invest in others, particularly those who are younger and eager to grow.

Pope Sonia. This is for Sonia Art, a member of the church I served in San Diego. Sonia has crippling cerebral palsy. She can do virtually nothing for herself, including eating, dressing, and bathing. But her mind is sharp and she has an important ministry of prayer and encouragement. She rises above her circumstance with confidence in God's love for her. This name becomes an aspiration for shedding pettiness by being grounded in higher truths of kingdom perspective.

Pope Henry. This is for Covenant pastor Henry Greenidge. The Covenant is committed to being a multiethnic reflection of the kingdom of God. The way requires wisdom, intentionality, persistence, and even insistence at points. Henry has believed in the basic intent of the Covenant since before there was much reason to believe. Like the prophet

Nathan to King David, he knows how to share insight and truth in ways that can be heard, which consequently moves people to deep reflection and better action. This name becomes an aspiration to live into the reality that in Christ there is neither slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, male nor female.

Pope Grace. This is for Grace and Bob Shim, Covenant missionaries. They left lucrative medical opportunities to serve in a country we cannot mention in print, and now in Thailand. I have observed their humility, giftedness, and effectiveness. In them I see that success and significance are not the same. This name becomes an aspiration to seek first the kingdom of God.

Pope Paul Glenn. This one recognizes my two living predecessors, Paul Larsen (1986-1998) and Glenn Palmberg (1998-2008). Paul was insistent we not settle into missional malaise, which we could have as a comfortably "successful-enough" group. Glenn was insistent that the mission be understood holistically, lacing together evangelism and compassion, mercy, and justice. Much of our momentum and posture is the result of the dual-influences of these two. This name becomes an aspiration to frequently ask, "Lord, what more is there for us to do?"

Pope Juana. This is for Juana Nesta, member of the Covenant Executive Board. It's not because we are both graduates of the same university (me two decades before). Juana works professionally as an educator. Additionally, she gives voluminous amounts of time to not just one Hispanic congregation she and husband Fil are starting, but a second one as well. Maybe she needs more balance. But maybe the rest of us need more zeal. This name becomes an aspiration to live in abandonment to God. When our kids were quite young, our oldest daughter proclaimed herself to be Saint Amy the Wonderful. She is indeed. However, the point here is not a name that calls attention to ourselves, but one that points away to a set of values and priorities.

And so, what name would you choose? And more challenging, would someone choose yours? ■

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