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## From +John...

Kia tau te rangimarie ki a koutou,

When I was doing formation work at our National Seminary many years ago, I used to often say to the students that when ordained, they would be privileged to be called “Father.” But I also used to say that they had to earn the privilege of being called “Father” because of the way they were living their lives - serving the people of God in such a way that they were bringing life and hope to the People of God.

Last weekend I read an article written by a priest from France, Jean-Pierre Roche, entitled “Stop calling me Father.” Like him, I now wonder why we priests are called “Father.” In August last year Pope Francis wrote a Letter to the People of God, to all of us. The Holy Father appealed to all of God’s people to take action against “clericalism” which he sees as the source of abuse perpetrated by priest and bishops. In his article Jean-Pierre Roche says that we may be able to make some small changes to overcome clericalism by not expecting to be called “Father.” He wrote about three reasons why we should not be called “Father.”

The first reason is to be found in the Gospel. We are all disciples of Jesus who said “You are not to be called ‘Master’ – you have but one Master, and you are all brothers and sisters. And do not call anyone on earth ‘Father,’ for you have but one Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 23:8-9) These words are, of course, difficult to interpret and understand, but the meaning is clear. Jean-Pierre Roche says that to be called “Father” is to usurp the place of God. It becomes even more serious if a priest begins to play God – and sometimes that is what “clericalism” is.

Secondly, calling us “Father” makes our people act in such a way that people are put into a relationship of parent and child. It is not possible to have equal relationships between adults who are brothers and sisters if we call one of them “Father.” We all share the dignity of the daughters and sons of God. If we want the Church to be a family where we care for and look after one another we need to reflect on these words from the Second Vatican Council: “Even though some, by the will of Christ, are made doctors and pastors for the good of others, in terms of the dignity and activities of all the faithful in the edification of the Body of Christ, there is true equality among all.” *Lumen Gentium* 32

Finally, he says that the practice of calling us “Father” can be unhealthy because it becomes an expression of dependence which is based on a false and unreal idea of obedience.

Being called “Father” may seem important to some priests, but is it really that important? What is more important is that we live and act in such a way that we treat one another as the daughters and sons of God.

Making a choice to tell the people we serve not to call us Father (or for me “Your Eminence” or “Cardinal”) might seem a very small thing to do, but it may be the beginning of the reform in the Church which we have been asked to do by Pope Francis. Our priesthood is our response to living out our Baptism. It is our common Baptism that gives us the dignity of the daughters and sons of God.

Naku noa. Na + Hoane

## NEWS . . .

- Archbishop Novatus Rugambwa has been appointed as **Apostolic Nuncio** to New Zealand and Apostolic Delegate to the countries of the Pacific. Archbishop Novatus’ appointment was announced in the Vatican City on 29 March 2019. He is due to be in New Zealand at the beginning of June.
- 15th April **South Island Chrism Mass**, 7pm St Mary’s, Blenheim.
- 16th April Day of **Prayer and Reflection** for North Island Clergy at St Thomas More, Wilton and North Island Chrism Mass, St Teresa’s Pro-Cathedral, Karori 7pm. Please remember to send your RSVP to my office before 8 April 2019 (this coming Monday).
- The **Euthanasia Bill** is about to get its 2nd reading and vote in parliament. I bring to your attention the opportunity to sign the petition, available at parish Masses this and next weekend, to let your MP know your opposition of this Bill.

Christ is Alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world. The very first words, then, , that I would like to say to every young Christian are these: “Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!”

*Opening paragraph Christus Vivit  
Pope Francis to  
Young People and the entire People of God*