

Addressing the Priest

What Do I Call You?

How to Address an Episcopal Priest

"What do I call you?" Visitors and newcomers will often ask this question concerning the priest. The answer is various in the DO's, and pretty short in the DON'T's.

The proper, written title of an Episcopal priest is, The Reverend (The Rev.) _____.

Appropriate

Many priests are perfectly fine in being addressed, by adults, by his or her Christian (given, first) name.

Some priests wish to be called *Reverend*, followed by a first or last name. This depends upon the priest and the culture of that particular parish or diocese (church region, under a bishop).

Some priests wish to be called *Pastor*, followed by a first or last name. This is less frequent and not traditionally Episcopalian, but it does eliminate some confusion.

In many parishes, especially in the north or in areas that were once heavily influenced by missionaries (18th-19th centuries), the priest may be referred to as *Father* (Fr.), followed by first or last name.

Sometimes, then, when a female priest follows a male priest in pastoral succession at such a parish, the priest may adopt the title, *Mother* (Mtr.) followed by first or last name.

This is the case at Holy Trinity Essex, where the more recent rectors (pastors) of the parish have been known as "Father." As Holy Trinity Essex presently has a woman priest and rector, she prefers to be addressed as "Mother," followed by her first, Christian name: Mother (Mtr.) Lisa.

If this is uncomfortable for any adult, Lisa is perfectly fine with being addressed by her given name. If parents are uncomfortable with *Mother* (and therefore, presumably, also *Father*), they are asked to guide their children to address the priest as *Rev. Lisa*. Please do not refer to Mtr./Rev. Lisa as, *Miss Lisa*.

What is Not Appropriate

It is not appropriate to refer to an Episcopal priest, in parish life, by a secular title, such as *Mr*. It is likewise not appropriate to refer to a female Episcopal priest, in parish life, by a title that refers to her marital status: "Mrs.," "Ms.," or "Miss."

Sometimes this is referred to as a "Southern practice," or "manners." A simple rubric, no matter the region, is this: if you might not refer to a physician, judge, police officer, military personnel, by his/her civil/marital title while on duty, it is inappropriate to do so with a priest—who is always on duty.

It is also not appropriate to refer to anyone by a name they do not prefer or do not claim, such as a nickname, label, etc. This denies a person's self-determination and perhaps the way by which this person hears God's individual call.

What to Do?

Listen to others refer to the priest and do likewise, read how he/she refers to him/herself, or please just ask the priest!