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Dear friends,

What is in a title? I remember shocking one of the members of the congregation at St. Edmund and St. Mary Parish Church around three and a half year ago. She called after me, "Rector!" I looked rather bemused and said, "I am a person, not a title. I would much rather that you called me Patrick". And so it has been. I am delighted to go into local shops or see people who know me in the street, and have them all say, "Hello Patrick, how are you?" Sadly, many people still look the other way, or ignore me, but those who know me call me by name. This is, of course, how it should be. Calling people by a title is both putting your own expectations on a person, putting them in your own little box of understandings, and putting a barrier between yourself and the person. It means you want a professional relationship with them, rather than a relationship with them as an individual. You do not need to know anything about them as an individual, only that they fulfil the function you expect of that title. It is unimportant who the postman is, as long as he delivers the letters. You do not care who the Policeman is, as long as you he comes when you call 999. A member of the clergy is different.

You rightly have expectations if you speak to a member of the clergy. They believe in God, the redeeming actions of his Son Jesus, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the power of prayer. There would be little point in being a member of the clergy if you did not believe in these things. I have been personally surprised over the years to find some people that I have spoken with did not expect me to believe these things. So even a pre-requisite of faith is not in everyone's expectations of a member of the clergy!

I know that some people feel that my main function is as custodian of two ancient building, something a friend rather unkindly called, 'keeper of the shrines'. He is still a friend! Of course, part of any clergy person's functions is the involvement in the maintenance of the buildings, so that future generations have a suitable place to worship God. But this is also very much the function of Church Wardens, for whom it is a specific responsibility. The clergy, in partnership with others, have the main responsibility in growing the church. If when

you read the word 'church', you just think of the building, then you are missing the point. The church building purely exists as the place for the people, the church, to gather and engage in religious activity. In relation to a building other than either of those of the benefice, John Gladwin, Bishop of Chelmsford, made it very clear at a public meeting that the architectural significance of a building was not a guarantee it would never close. It needed a church, a group of worshipping people with a vision of their role in the community, to sustain the building and prove it still had a function. If there are no people, there is no church. A member of the clergy has a significant role in developing and growing the church.

Being available for people is also key to the role. Be they bereaved, wishing to be married, delighted at the birth of a baby, or numerous other situations, there is an obvious role for the member of the clergy both to listen and to perform certain functions.

Over three and a half years I have realised that there are many roles to being the member of the clergy at Ingatestone with Fryerning that were different than those at Leyton. Sue, full of the terminology from fresh theological training, tells me it is all called 'multi tasking'. But the core elements, that I have outlined here, are exactly the same in all contexts and throughout the ages. It is sad that some people simply do not understand why the church exists and could be relevant to them, or what possible functions a member of the clergy could have in their lives. It is very interesting working with Sue, because she is new to all this and is having to grapple with it all. If people are unclear as to my functions, they are even less sure about hers!

So do titles of clergy matter? It should be clear now that my view is emphatically no. It is important that people understand why there are clergy. I wear my collar so that I am identifiable, just in the same way that a postman or a policeman is identifiable. But it is not to identify me as anything other than someone trying to live a life guided by God and with particular functions, whose name is Patrick. The qualities I bring should be governed by humility. Everyone of us is a unique child of God. Jesus tells us God knows everything there is to know about each and everyone of us. We are all in this life together. St. Paul is clear that one of the Christian distinctives is not to 'Lord it over others'. As Christians we live by a different set of values to those who do not understand that we are all children of God, and it is how we live our lives in community that matters. To God, we are all individuals, not categories or titles.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick.*

