

bishops, Timothy and Titus: “my own son in the faith,” and “mine own son after the common faith,” and the runaway slave, Onesimus: “my son.”

So then, the concept of a spiritual father is there from the beginning.

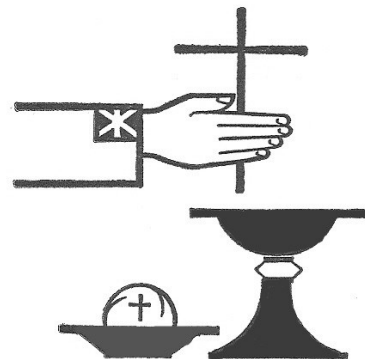
The Family

Moreover, the concept of the Church as “God’s Holy Family” necessitates the inclusion of the term. The Pastor is the *father*. The parish church is the *house*. The altar is the *family table*. The parishioners are the *children*. The Liturgy of Word and Sacrament is the *Meal*.

Examples

It is interesting to note that, at his death-bed, one of Blessed Martin Luther’s best friends and colleagues, Father Justus Jonas, spoke to the dying reformer and addressed him as “Reverend Father.” Then too, it is not uncommon in our own day for those addressing church conventions and conferences to call the group “Fathers and Brethren.” Even the common term for Bishop of Rome (“pope”) has its origin in the Italian “papa,” which means “head of the household.”

Whatever term we use for our clergy, we Lutherans remember that the Bible commands respect when we are informed that our pastors “be counted worthy of double honor” (1 Timothy 5.17).



What Shall I Call Him?

A clergyman is different from other people. And the difference lies, not in the man himself, but in the Sacred Office he bears. His vocation has been stamped with the approval of Heaven itself in the Rite of Holy Ordination. It is for this reason that custom has developed, urging Christians to indicate their love and respect for the clergy by according them certain titles.

The Pristine Church

Even in the earliest Christian days, titles like “Lord,” “Master,” and “Disciple” were used, either in direct address or in reference to Christ and His followers. At the same time, we note that the Holy Apostles were called “Paul,” “James,” “Peter,” and so forth. Even Our Blessed Lord, Himself, was addressed as “Jesus.” But the use of first names at that time did not indicate disrespect: rather a certain intimacy existed in the early days of Christianity, probably because the Church was still “underground,” worshipping behind locked doors, then secretly in the catacombs. Besides this, last names, like certain titles, had not yet developed.

Time and Growth

But times changed, and the Church became larger. With the vision of the Emperor Constantine came the advent of Christianity as a state religion. Churches were built, and Christianity soon took on the aspects of the established government of the Roman Empire. The emperor and other officials had titles: and so, the clergy added certain titles to the variety already in use.

Function Dictates

And so, from her birth until the Church emerged from the days of persecution, she accumulated many names and titles for those in her Sacred Ministry. For example: “bishop” (overseer), “presbyter” (priest), “deacon” (server), “prophet” (preacher), “teacher” (instructor), “martyr” (one who sheds blood), “saint” (distinguished member of the Community of Holy Ones), “confessor” (witnessing bishop), “angel” (the Pastor-messenger)— not to mention such eminent titles as “Apostle” and “Evangelist.”

Later, such terms as “rector” (ruler), “pastor” (shepherd), “curate” (caretaker), and “father” came into use. But in all cases, the function of the man within the Office of the Holy Ministry dictated his title.

The Lutherans

In contrast to the sectarians, many of whom call their clergymen “Mister,” those of the Church of the Augsburg Confession have retained the use of proper clerical titles.

For example, Lutherans never abandoned the term “Father.” This title, of course, finds its origin in the Scriptures, where St. Paul says to the saints at Corinth: “I speak as to all my children.” And St. John says: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” Furthermore, St. Paul also calls the young