

An Interview with The Archbishop



By Fr Daniel Esteban

I had the opportunity to interview His Grace Archbishop Rima Tamaiparea-Puki after his recent visit to South Africa. He spoke with me about the international Church, his role; his ministry and discussed his Christian and priestly journey of the last ten-years. This is his interview unedited.

FrDE: Your Grace, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. You have had an interesting journey and we are grateful to talk with you about your recent pastoral visit and the Church in general. Can you tell us a little about the Church, your role and why you went so far from New Zealand to ordain a priest?

Archbishop: Dit is 'n plesier (*Afrikaans: It is a pleasure*). The Church has a peculiar name 'The Reformed Old Catholic Church', but it's an important one because it expresses our connection to antiquity, our heritage (the Romans would call it heretical - which is very exciting!), our current situation and where the Church is headed. We are part of the Independent Sacramental Movement (ISM), so we are not mainstream and probably never will be. Our liturgy leans more to the traditional side which is not common practice in most parishes.

I am a bishop of the Church (Archdiocese of Oceania) with jurisdiction over areas where our people reside without episcopal oversight. Australia, Brazil, Tahiti, Tonga, Vanuatu and South Africa. I will serve these areas until they are of such a size as to become independent and elect their own bishop.

There are three countries in my province that have episcopal oversight: New Zealand, The Philippines and Cuba. Now that you know the province, you understand why I went to South Africa.

FrDE: Your Grace, can you tell us a little about the international Church?

Archbishop: Typical of most ISM Churches, we are small - thank goodness! Our Church is relatively new. We were formally organised in 2014. We haven't yet reached a decade. We don't have the hang-ups or baggage of the mainstream Churches and the introduction of things that would otherwise be controversial elsewhere, is not an issue for us. Who knows... in another 50 years, we could become just as irrelevant, just as obsolete as our sister Churches are at present! Having said that, we are very much attached to the ancient One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. We exist on five of the seven continents (the Arctic and the Antarctic don't really count) which means those faithful can receive the Sacraments. Growth is steady, but not rapid. I'm not sure we could cope otherwise...

FrDE: Why are the Churches within the ISM so fractured?

Archbishop: Excellent question! It's made up of human-beings. Everybody wants to be the boss. If it doesn't go their way, then they leave in a huff and begin something else. I have seen it time and again. Our Church is no exception! We have had our fair share of dissatisfied clergy, sometimes they're right and other times they're not... Some are so easily unsettled, unwilling to play the long haul game and jump around from place to place. Not good for their ministry and not good for the people they may serve.

FrDE: Has Your Grace made mistakes?

Archbishop: What a question... Of course! But when it comes to being at the head of a Church, it's important to surround yourself with decisive people, so that you make good decisions. I have a very good spiritual director and he has stood at the helm with me when making important decisions. He is cut-throat and doesn't hold back on giving his professional opinion on circumstances, people and issues that require my attention. He is not my friend, so therefore not biased. He is not remunerated (his request), so is not bound to tell me what I want. He challenges my thinking. Often he has seen things that I haven't and given wonderful guidance and advice on how to deal with certain issues. He is a good sounding board. I trust him absolutely. There is nothing I have withheld from him. In my own life, yes, I have made lots of mistakes. I have regrets. They are my own and do not belong to the Church and so far, I have led the Church the best way I know how, with the assistance of good people. Thank God for their support!

FrDE: How did your journey to priesthood begin?

Archbishop: When I was eight-years old. It has taken a different route to the norm but eventually got there. I thank God for good parents, family and friends who unintentionally helped me in my vocation. It has not been easy but I wouldn't change it.

FrDE: When Your Grace received consecration, what was the process and how did you receive the news?

Archbishop: It was overwhelming but not unexpected. I was it, so it made sense. My mentor at the time said “well you have the job, no point whinging, get on with it”. Don’t get me wrong. I was scared. That was the best advice ever. Ultimately it was an experience I wouldn’t wish on anyone. It was stressful and all I could worry about was getting to the other side. That was six-years ago. Ask me the same question when I am decrepit. The answer might be different...

FrDE: Your Grace, one last question, please would you tell us about your visit to South Africa?

Archbishop: Where do I begin? The highlight of my visit was the ordination to the priesthood of Mother Carla van Aswegen. Like all of my priestly children, Mother had a vocation. She wasn’t accepted by her own congregation for one reason or another. I made her an offer some years back that if she still wasn’t accepted then I would ordain her.

FrDE: Why didn’t they accept her?

Archbishop: Last question huh? Haha... Sorry, that story’s not mine to tell but she came to me and I accepted her. Ultimately, this is God’s work, not mine. If God wants this to happen, God needs to open the doors. We were in a pandemic, the borders to our country were closed. No amount of money could open them - it would have to be divine intervention. All the obstacles that were before us, melted away. I am grateful to my benefactors and two in particular who without their assistance would not have made this pastoral visit a possibility. We visited with family, made new friends and opened the doors for new possibilities. May God bring it all to fruition! Thank you Father for interviewing me. I don’t think many would be interested in the twaddle I have to say but it might be good for someone. God bless you; so do I.

FrDE: Your Grace, delighted to be with you today and look forward to another interview in the future?

Archbishop: I’m changing my contact details...