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THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

DOCTRINE, ETHICS AND WORSHIP COMMITTEE

GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF CLERICAL VESTMENTS AND FORMAL METHODIST ECCLESIASTICAL ATTIRE.

What are Clerical Vestments and why do Ministers and Preachers wear them?

- *The distinctive clothes normally worn by Ministers and Preachers in the course of conducting Services of Worship.*
- *It is not the purpose of distinctive clerical and liturgical clothing to give the impression of superior status to the Minister or Preacher.* Ministers and Preachers, when conducting Services of Worship, presiding over the Sacraments and preaching, do not do so as individuals. While individuality, talent and skill enhance the Minister or Preacher's proclamation of God's grace, the individuality of the Minister or Preacher is of secondary importance to the Church's proclamation of the gospel of grace.
- *Ministers and Preachers represent the Church of Christ in all places and all ages,* drawing the authority of their message from the gracious call of God upon their lives, their dependence upon the leading of the Holy Spirit, their subjection to the tradition of the Apostles and the Holy Scriptures.
- *It is the purpose of Clerical vestments to mask the individuality of the Minister or Preacher and demonstrate that the Minister or Preacher is a servant of Jesus Christ and the whole Church in all places and all ages.*
- *The Methodist tradition follows the practice of John Wesley who, although he was an Anglican priest, chose the "plainness" of the Puritan pattern of clerical vestment.* Thus Methodists avoid elaborate or ornate clerical vestments, neatness and plainness being considered consistent with Methodism's concern for the poor, a spirit of humility and the demeanour of "the servant of all."

Generally acceptable forms of clerical vestment

Gowns: These originate from the ancient Greco-Roman world, when the *toga* was the accepted form of dress for teachers.

Preferred by the reformed tradition in the wider Church, the Gown is traditionally associated with those Christian traditions that regard the Ministry of the Word as the central act of worship and moment of encounter with the living and present Lord Jesus Christ.

Gowns fall into two categories:

- (i) ***Preaching Gowns*** are often associated with the city of Geneva and the Reformer, John Calvin. There are a variety of patterns of preaching gowns, generally distinguished by having a closed front and closed, long sleeves. Preaching gowns are generally black.
- (ii) ***Academic Gowns***, associated with formal academic dress in universities, colleges, other tertiary academic institutions and schools. Academic gowns signify various levels of academic qualification (e.g. Diploma, Undergraduate, Graduate, Doctorate.) Academic gowns are generally open fronted and open sleeved and are usually black, although doctoral gowns

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may be in various shades of red. Different academic institutions specify particular patterns for the gowns required for their academic convocations.

While the ***Preaching Gown*** is an acceptable vestment for all occasions of public worship, the ***Academic Gown*** is most appropriately worn when the Minister or Preacher is specifically signifying that s/he is acting in a teaching capacity, or the occasion has to do specifically with the teaching office of the Church, such as Sunday School teachers dedication services, school occasions, the Public Recognition of Local Preachers, Public Reception of New Members (Confirmation) Services and the like.

Academic Hoods: Although the academic hood has its origin in the monastic tradition (its origin is the monk's cowl), its use has become almost entirely secular. The Academic Hood is used to signify the tertiary academic qualifications the wearer has attained. It is ostentatious and therefore bad form to wear more than one hood at a time, unless instructed to do so for the purpose of a specific academic occasion and at the request of the academic institution holding that occasion. In the event that the Minister or Preacher has more than one academic diploma or degree signified by a hood, the hood that is worn is the hood representing the wearer's highest academic qualification. *Hoods, like academic gowns, are worn only when the occasion demands that the teaching office of the Minister or Preacher or the Church be signified.* The hood is always worn in conjunction with an academic gown or a cassock.

Cassocks: Two types of cassock are common in modern Methodism:

- (i) The *Alb*, which is an ankle length white linen tunic (its original name in Latin was a *Tunica Alba*, meaning "white tunic") derived from the common dress of New Testament times and associated with Jesus' seamless robe (John 19:23).
- (ii) The *Cassock*, usually black, although other colours may be worn. The cassock dates from the late Roman Empire (5th century), when clergy were distinguished from laity by the fact that laity wore the cassock as a short tunic and clergy wore it as an ankle length garment. The cassock may be worn with or without a *girdle*, a belt made of cord or leather, or a *cincture*, a broad belt, usually of cloth, sometimes tasselled.

In choosing either or both, Methodism's preference for plainness and simplicity of colour and design should be observed.

Stoles: A long scarf used to signify various types of ordained ministry in the Church. The *stole* originated in the Roman Empire as a method of identifying persons performing various administrative and leadership functions (e.g. magistrates, senators, consuls.) Stoles may be worn to signify the following ministries in the following ways:

- (i) *Bishops:* The stole is worn to signify the ministry of oversight on formal ceremonial occasions when the Bishop represents either the District over which the Bishop has oversight or when representing the Connexion. In The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, it has become customary that the Bishop wears a red stole over a black

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gown or cassock and a white clerical (Roman) collar, with the stole hanging free in front from both shoulders.

- (ii) *Presbyters (Ordained Ministers)*: The stole is worn to signify that the presbyter (ordained minister) has pastoral charge and oversight of a society, section of a circuit or circuit. In cases where a minister in training (probationer) has pastoral charge and has dispensation to preside over the Sacraments in a particular circuit, the stole may be worn. The stole is worn in the same manner as the Bishop, over a gown, alb or cassock and a white clerical collar, over both shoulders, with the ends of the stole hanging free in front. Presbyters may wear the stole on ceremonial occasions at Convocations, Conferences and Synods when the presbyter is representing her/his pastoral charge and only at the discretion of and on the specific instruction of the person presiding over the occasion. The presiding person shall nominate the colour of stole to be worn.
- (iii) *Deacons*: The stole is worn to signify that the deacon has been appointed to a specific ministry of service within a Circuit. The deacon's stole signifies the ministry of service and is worn over a gown, alb or cassock but not necessarily a clerical collar. The deacon's stole is worn over the left shoulder and fastened at the right hip.

Colours: Liturgical colours are intended to signify specific seasons or occasions in the Church's life. The use of liturgical colours maintains the congregation's interest in the unfolding story of God's grace as it is told through the Christian Calendar and contributes to a sense of "occasion", especially during the great seasons of the Church. Other drapes, banners and even the principal colours of the flower arrangements in the church, when linked to the seasonal colours, can add interest to the routine pattern of the worshipping congregation's life. Those who choose to wear a stole should have a full set of stoles in the various liturgical colours and must wear the colour appropriate to the season or occasion. The colours and their respective seasons or occasions are as follows:

Purple: Advent, Lent, Funeral and memorial services. Purple is associated with repentance (appropriate to Advent and Lent) and with mourning.

White or Gold: Christmas (until Epiphany, 6th January); Easter (and all Sundays after Easter until the Sunday before Pentecost); Ascension and the Sunday before Pentecost, Weddings, Ordinations, Induction Services. White or Gold is associated with celebration.

Red: Pentecost (when Red is associated with the flame signifying the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:3); occasions commemorating martyrdom (when Red signifies blood) and specifically Southern African Methodist occasions (Covenant Services; Public Reception into Full Membership). Note that the use of red is not exclusive to Bishops when worn for these purposes.

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Green: “Common time.” This includes the Sundays after Epiphany (6th January) until the Sunday before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent and all the Sundays following Pentecost, until the fifth Sunday before Christmas. Green is associated with life and growth and signifies the ongoing life and growth of individual Christians and the Christian Church.

“Tabs” or “Bands”: These are two white linen strips approximately 15cms long and 4cms wide attached below the clerical collar. They are remnants of the white linen or silk scarf traditionally worn by members of the professions of divinity, law and medicine (although medical doctors have ceased to do so in modern times.) Tabs or bands are worn to signify that the wearer is a suitably qualified and recognised member of one of those professions. Accordingly tabs or bands may be worn only by ordained ministers.

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Rosebank, Cape Town
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