

Diocese of York
Guidance as to the vesture of clergy

The amendments to the Canons of the Church of England relating to the vesture of clergy have now been enacted. A copy of the amended Canon B8 is attached, underlining the amendments. The Canon sets out the form of vesture required, but then permits the minister to agree that a different form of dress will normally be worn. Whilst the requirements as to vesture have been considerably relaxed this does not mean that anything goes. Key points to have in mind are:

- The minister may not change the form of vesture in use in any church or chapel in which he or she officiates without first consulting with the relevant PCC to establish that the proposed change will be acceptable.
- At Holy Communion and Morning and Evening Prayer, no change to the vesture specified in the Canon may be made unless the minister has consulted with the PCC to establish that the proposed change will be acceptable and that the change will benefit the mission of the church.
- At the Occasional Offices, the minister must agree the form of dress to be worn with the individuals concerned.
- The form of dress adopted must not such as to indicate a departure from the doctrines contained in the formularies of the Church of England

The choice of vesture is therefore not that of the minister alone. Consultation must take place with the PCC. In a multi-parish benefice, this could mean that different arrangements are reached with each individual PCC. Equally, the PCC cannot require the minister to adopt a form of dress other than that specified by Canon B8. Where disagreement arises between the minister and the PCC, the relevant suffragan bishop has the authority to determine the matter.

Particular sensitivity is required in relation to vesture at Occasional Offices as the individuals involved may have specific expectations, particularly if they do not worship at the church concerned on a regular basis. Care must be taken to consult these individuals about the form of dress proposed if the minister wishes to depart from the vesture specified in the Canon. Where a service of Baptism is held at public worship, the requirement to consult with the family does not arise and the form of dress agreed with the PCC may be worn. Nevertheless, if the minister and PCC have agreed a departure from the form of vesture specified by the Canon, the family should be made aware of this so that it does not come as a surprise. A minister may not refuse to perform an occasional office that he or she is under a duty to undertake on the grounds that agreement cannot be reached as to the

form of vesture to be worn. Disputes as to vesture must be referred to the relevant suffragan bishop for determination.

Caroline Mockford

Registrar of the Province and Diocese of York

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B 8 Of the vesture of ordained and authorized ministers during the time of divine service

1. The Church of England does not attach any particular doctrinal significance to the diversities of vesture permitted by this Canon, and the vesture worn by the minister in accordance with the provision of this Canon is not to be understood as implying any doctrines other than those now contained in the formularies of the Church of England.

2. Notwithstanding the provisions of this Canon no minister shall change the form of vesture specified in this Canon which is in use in the church or chapel in which he officiates unless he has ascertained by consultation with the parochial church council that such changes will be acceptable: ~~Provided always that in case of disagreement the minister shall refer the matter to the bishop of the diocese, whose direction shall be obeyed.~~

3. At the Holy Communion the presiding minister shall wear either a surplice or alb with scarf or stole unless the minister has ascertained by consultation with the parochial church council that adopting some other form of dress will be acceptable and will benefit the mission of the Church in the parish. When a stole is worn other customary vestments may be added. The epistoler and gospeller (if any) may wear surplice or alb to which other customary vestments may be added.

4. At Morning and Evening Prayer on Sundays the minister shall normally wear a surplice or alb with scarf or stole but the minister may adopt some other form of dress to wear on a general basis if the minister has ascertained by consultation with the parochial church council that doing so will be acceptable and will benefit the mission of the Church in the parish.

4A. Where, in a case within paragraph 2, 3 or 4, there is a disagreement between the minister and the parochial church council, the minister shall refer the matter to the bishop of the diocese, whose direction shall be obeyed.

5. ~~At the Occasional Offices~~ At a service of Baptism that is not held at public worship or at the Solemnization of Matrimony or a service for the burial of the dead the minister shall wear a surplice or alb with scarf or stole or shall adopt such other form of dress as the minister agrees with the persons concerned.

6. Where a minister adopts a form of dress other than vesture of a form specified in this Canon, the form of dress so adopted must (in addition to the requirements of Canon C 27) not be such as to indicate a departure from the doctrines now contained in the formularies of the Church of England.

C 27 Of the dress of ministers

The apparel of a bishop, priest, or deacon shall be suitable to his office; and, save for purposes of recreation and other justifiable reasons, shall be such as to be a sign and mark of his holy calling and ministry as well to others as to those committed to his spiritual charge.