

### ***III. Cluing Them In: “The Postulant’s Guide”***

Increasingly our clergy are being formed outside the environment of this church’s seminaries. The bishop is thus confronted with the problem of the *tradition of the lore*, the passing on of the unwritten traditions and practices that every profession possesses. The specimen given below is an abbreviated version of what I normally distribute, the full text of which includes an element of play not readily understood outside the personal relationship between bishop and postulants. It intentionally focuses on the topics that fascinate seminarians, at least as observed in my time of seminary teaching. Accordingly, rather a lot of ink is given to apparel and terms of address, but the real theme is collegiality.

#### ***The Postulant’s OTHER Guide in the Diocese of Bethlehem***

Congratulations on your postulancy. In addition to the official diocesan ordination guide prepared by the bishop and Commission on Ministry, I am sending you what follows, hence the title, the *other* guide. This booklet comes from two experiences. The first is that of being asked many questions repeatedly. The second is that of seeing awkward moments occur where people were behaving with the best possible will but just did not have the appropriate information.

Thus this information is for you as you begin your journey, but it is not intended for reaching judgments about people who may have been formed in other ways in other places and at other times. It is an attempt to describe one state of the art; one universe among many possible universes. Like all maps it is a lie if taken too seriously. Thus it is not shared with the aim of disparaging those from other cultures or with other sensibilities. That is, I am trying to be somewhat playfully *descriptive* of some cultural norms in a specific place and time (“northeast corridor” Episcopalians in the early Twenty-First Century). It is well to remember that the only thing worse than a gaffe on one’s own part is publicly

pointing out someone else's gaffe. This explains the simultaneous unpopularity and fear of fashion critics and gossip columnists.

### *The Daily Office*

Ordained ministry is spiritually demanding and this diocese requires its clergy to have a spiritual director, make retreats, and attend clergy Bible studies and clergy days, all in the service of maintaining and increasing the spiritual and mental health of the clergy. Additionally, clergy need to pray if they are to survive. Consequently as of this moment, and in your own interests, you are expected to say at least Morning and Evening Prayer every day for the rest of your life, alone or with others. Noonday Prayer and Compline are optional, but recommended. The office can be read or sung online, if that helps. It works for the bishop. Point your browser to <http://www.missionstclare.com/>. You may choose English or Spanish. Make it your homepage, perhaps.

### *Ember Letters*

Are herewith abolished. You are expected, per the canon, to visit with the bishop in each of the ember months. It is up to you to make the appointment.

### *Collars*

There is no provision for a "seminarian's collar" in this diocese. A word about clerical dress may be appropriate in this place. The point of any professional costume is to indicate function and availability. When the time does come to don the cloth, please note that in preferred use clergy shirts, vests, and rabats for deacons and priests are black. In the originating period of what we would recognize as western clergy street dress (actually rather recent) it was the black, and not the collar (which came later) that was the indication that one was a member of the clergy or judiciary. I confess to thinking that the introduction of purple shirts in this country in the 1960s and 1970s was a mistake and do not often wear them. A frock coat would work with my figure but I do not have the nerve.

*Threads and Accessories*

You can find historical “precedent” for anything your heart desires, but this is not really the point of vesture or professional street dress. The most important principle is rather simple, however. *Try to look like you fit in* with the others. You are part, or are preparing to be part, of a collegial ministry: fashion competition and strong personal statements are inappropriate because they are corrosive of collegiality and suggest that you think you are a cut above your colleagues. Simple is best in cassock, alb, surplice, and other things we wear in common. Acting out your issues through what you wear or refuse to wear embarrasses you, your profession, and the church. Apparently my concerns here are not a modern issue: the council held in London in 1268 decreed against clerical costume that was “ridiculous or remarkable.”

Acquire a cassock that reaches the top of your shoes, and a surplice nearly that long, for the morning and evening office and for occasions when you are assisting liturgically and an alb is not appropriate. Cassocks do not have little detachable capes (mozettas) unless you are a rector or canon, and they do not have piping of either red or purple unless you are at least a canon. “Cottas” and short surplices of the kind worn in the Roman Church were developed long after the Reformation, and in our setting can claim no place. Anglican-style cassocks require a cincture. Canons and the archdeacon wear a purple cassock for the office and may wear a mass cassock (black with red piping) at the eucharist. In this diocese we use red-purple for canons’ choir cassocks.

Acquire a simple white unadorned alb (and amice) or cassock alb, and a simple white rope cincture (some modern albs do not require a cincture\*). The word “alb” is the abbreviation

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\*Cinctures (originally belts) seem to have entered in the ninth century as a deliberate attempt to emulate the practice of ancient Israel, and are increasingly seen as dispensable in our own day. Amices, the last of the traditional vestments to be added, were adopted to protect vestments from soil; the combination of modern bathing and laundering practices should make them unnecessary.

for “tunica longa alba” (long white dress). The word alb means “white.” Thus, brown, grey, and oatmeal are not appropriate colors, as patristic material emphasizes the whiteness of the vestment. It is the basic and most ancient liturgical garment of bishops, priests, deacons, and other liturgical ministers. Like the cassock, the alb should reach the top of your shoes. If you cannot resist a lace alb, you must wear a cassock underneath it.

As you age, your figure will almost certainly change, and you may need to have a new cassock and alb made. Nothing looks worse than a vestment that has begun to ride mid-calf because of our sagging tissue: all of its lines are distorted. When this day comes, the cincture is still worn over the navel, not snuggled under the paunch or perched above it. As we age further, we inevitably lose height, and further adjustments will be necessary.

Stoles worn over a cassock-alb with no chasuble over them are not crossed, nor are they tied down. They drape over the shoulders freely.

There are, unfortunately, not yet maternity vestments, and one trusts that the women clergy of the diocese have worked this out and perhaps have a trove from which to lend each other vesture of appropriate dimensions for use during pregnancy. Fuller chasubles and albs, and longer stoles might well be shared.

Wear black shoes, freshly shined, when officiating in liturgy. Shiny buckles are to be avoided. Fashions in women’s shoes are somewhat flexible, but it is to be remembered that classically, gentlemen do not wear loafers with suits. If you decide to wear loafers, tassels and pennies are to be avoided with vestments. Except on military duty, at disaster sites, or on very informal occasions, in our region of the country cowboy boots, boat shoes, sandals (except in the habit of religious orders), and work boots have a somewhat affected look in the liturgical ensemble. Very seriously, how we dress shows respect for other people and for the circumstances in which worship occurs. It is not an ideal world and people are “only human:” if you appear at the most sacred moment of most people’s week looking like you are stuck on yourself or have just been to a rodeo or a beach movie, do not

wonder if they do not take seriously what you do or say in the liturgy. It should not be that way, perhaps, but nonetheless it is.

I accept that the majority of clergy are “intuitive-feeling” types in the sense that psychological testing uses the expression, but the truth remains that in how you appear in the liturgical assembly *you do not gotta be you*. When all is said and done, if it’s about you, your taste, or your issues with authority, it’s probably not helpful to God’s people and should not be worn. If thinking this way raises very strong feelings for you, we should talk sooner rather than later.

You will notice that for Sunday visitations, the bishop’s vestments are rather modest. Most of our churches are of a size where the vestments appropriate to the cathedral or larger churches would overpower the liturgy and not contribute to worship. I mention this so that you will consider that ideally chasubles and copes should be designed for a particular room. While there is nothing wrong with clergy owning or even collecting vestments, only those should be worn in public that work in the particular space. If one will err, it should be on the side of simplicity. In general, before you start building any collection of vesture, please remember that vestments are distinguished more by the quality, shape and cut of their fabric, than by the amount of adornment they carry. Avoid anything with actual words on it.

As a postulant, candidate, deacon, or priest, you are not to wear a cross as part of your liturgical vesture (I prescind entirely, but reluctantly, from the question of so decorating acolytes and choirs). With street clothes you may wear a cross on a cord if you are connected with a religious order where this is required and a special cross is issued; other than that, crosses are not used by deacons and priests with a collar. In the liturgical vesture of the catholic west, unlike the orthodox east, crosses are part of the insignia of bishops, not an accessory for all clerics. (There is no Anglican rule of silver crosses for priests and gold for bishops — many bishops and even archbishops wear silver.) You are free to wear whatever you want under your vestments and shirt, of course. Notwithstanding all of this, if you feel compelled to wear

a cross with your clergy shirt, put it in your breast pocket and avoid the chain. Some women wear rather small crosses that are clearly jewelry and not an imitation of pectoral crosses, and that is acceptable. I do understand that Lutherans, who cling to the idea that there is but one order of ministry, and many protestants, wear large, even enormous, pectoral crosses with vesture. We do not share their ecclesiology and this distinction will have visual results.

Similarly, try not to wear rings other than rings given in troth when serving at the liturgy, because in worship a ring is a liturgical signicator. Additionally, jewelry that can be seen from more than a few feet away should not be worn when ministering liturgically. This includes watches and anything that dangles from perforations in your flesh. Military decorations are not worn on the tippet under any circumstances in this country. Tippets are best not equipped with seals, which in our country are saved for blazers.

It hardly needs to be said that the use of the biretta in the eucharistic liturgy is not an Anglican practice, and has been suppressed in the Roman Church since Vatican II and central heating, perhaps not in that order. Head cover of some kind (Canterbury caps are a little more Anglican) along with the cloak make very good sense when one is ministering out of doors at say, funerals or Rogation processions. In some parts of the Anglican Communion, head covering is *carried* during choir offices, but this seems rather a lot of work. The cloak (*cappa nigra*) is not a vestment, and for warmth's sake may be placed over whatever you have on liturgically.

*Mega-Don't*: there are never any situations in which it is proper to cross your legs while wearing vestments. In traditional vestments such posture looks uncouth and dissonant; in the cassock-alb it looks slovenly or even indecent.

You will in all probability soon be assisting at the altar if you are not already doing so. This is your first chance to experience collegiality and coordination. The practices and acts that are to be followed are those of the presider/celebrant. For instance, if

the presider makes the sign of the cross during “unite us to your Son in his sacrifice,” in Prayer B, so do you. If not, it is not well for you to do so. Upstaging the rector has a corrosive effect on people’s perceived but unarticulated ecclesiology, and sometimes has career implications for you. If a practice in the parish where you are assisting actually offends your conscience, as opposed to your sensibilities, it is essential that you thoroughly discuss it with the rector.

### *How to Write a Letter*

Even though church letters are very often business letters, the ecclesiastical custom, especially when writing to clergy with whom you are not at the moment entirely enraged, is to end the salutation with the more friendly comma rather than the colon usual in secular correspondence. You will also see “The Reverend” abbreviated as “The Rev’d,” an English practice; because the final consonant is used in that form, a period does not follow the abbreviation.

*To your own bishop:*

The Rt. Rev. Jane D. Smith  
333 Wyandotte, etc.  
Dear Bishop,

*To somebody else’s bishop:*

The Rt. Rev. John D. Smith  
etc.  
Dear Bishop Smith,

*or,*

Dear Bishop Jane,

*chilly or archaic,*

My dear Bishop,

*To the Presiding Bishop*

The Most Reverend Jane Smith  
815 Second Avenue, etc.  
Dear Bishop Smith,

*To an archdeacon*

The Ven. Jane Doe

Etc.

Dear Archdeacon Doe,

*To a canon*

The Rev. Canon John Smith

etc.

Dear Canon Smith,

*To a dean*

The Very Rev. John Doe

Etc.

Dear Dean Doe,

By long tradition (going back to before there were surnames), bishops often sign only their first name, or in more formal correspondence, may use their see as a surname (“William, Pennsylvania”), although this latter practice has a ducal ring and is usually saved for moments when heavy artillery is called for. Do not mistake a one-word signature for an invitation to address bishops by their first names in conversation. They will tell you that directly if it is the case. Remember, the use of titles creates a safe, respectful, and professional space, and thus it is for the sake of the safe relationship that you will probably not be invited to use the bishop’s Christian name alone. It is not about you; it is about space for work.

Which leads us to

### *Titles*

Once ordained, you are, in the third person, The Reverend Your Full Name. “The Reverend Father/Mother” before your name is not Anglican usage, nor is “Reverend” by itself a term of reference or address usual in the Episcopal Church. Sometimes “Mr.” or “Ms.” is substituted for the first name upon a second reference (“The Rev. Mr. Smith will also preach . . .”) but this is almost entirely disused in our region. Mr., Mrs., and Ms. are fine by themselves, although a bit archaic in much of the country.

Speaking descriptively, in this diocese the general practice is that clergy are addressed informally as “Father” or “Mother” with first or last name. Again, the use of titles creates a safe

professional space in which ministry can happen without implying or demanding *artificial intimacy*; in the end it protects the faithful more than it shows respect for your role, although it does do both. Some women clergy locally use other forms of address, given the variety of thinking about maternal titles, and this matter is still in flux. He will do his best, but please do not take it as a slight if the bishop does not remember particular forms of address you may have developed.

A cross, usually looking like a plus-sign, is a customary but not mandatory or universal part of the signature of bishops; in the last century a plus after the name became the fashion among some presbyters, although reasons for this are hard to explain. Notwithstanding any of that, using a plus sign as a form of address or term of reference is always incorrect (never say “Dear Jane +,” or “according to +Helen,” except in jests of exquisite dryness). The use of plusses by priests certainly would be appropriate only as a signature, never as a term of address or a reference in the third person, except, again, in jest.

If you use a plus, it is with the signature only and means that you don’t use any other designator.

*Correct:* Jane + or Jane Smith+.

*Incorrect:* The Rev. Jane Smith +, Fr. John Smith +, or using the plus sign as part of a typed signature block under your written signature.

Rural deans do not style themselves “The Very Reverend,” a title reserved to deans of institutions such as cathedrals and seminaries where there is an on-site staff. The term Dean comes from the Latin, indicating someone who presided over a staff of (at least) ten.

If you desire to indicate academic status on your letterhead, the degrees go after your name in ascending order of importance/rarity. Thus earned degrees go first, honorary degrees second, and higher honors last: “The Reverend Your Name, M.Div., J.D., D.D., F.R.H.S., M.B.E.” Only the highest degree in each category is used (thus, not both M.Div. and D. Min). If you have two Ph.D. and three D.D. degrees, you are still only Ph.D., D.D.

The practice of addressing people as “Doctor” varies from culture to culture. In America the old rules of our New World culture still apply: only with medicos and clergy do Americans use doctoral titles as a form of address in normal social intercourse. In first-tier educational institutions in America, faculty are never addressed as Doctor, as a doctorate is merely a credential everybody has. Practices vary on the lower tiers where possession of scholarly credentials may be more remarkable.

“The Reverend Doctor” sounds very grand, doesn’t it? It is best not to use it when referring to self, ever. In any event, “The Rev. Dr.” is, very strictly speaking, only to be used about those who have an honorary degree in the theological sphere, the D.D. or its relatives. This doctoral status was originally granted only to those who had made some important contribution to the life of the church and thus became its doctor (in the original sense of teacher). “The Reverend Doctor” has now been stretched to include those who have earned a doctorate in a theological subject, but again, this can seem a little pretentious when used about oneself. It is completely incorrect for someone who has a doctoral degree in a non-theological subject to refer to self in church circles as “The Reverend Doctor” — it is claiming a credential and authority in the church that one simply does not have. It would make as much sense as walking into a hospital and expecting to be called “Doctor” by the nursing staff because you once wrote a thesis on Proust.

*The time to be generous with honorifics is when writing to or about others.* If your friend or colleague has earned an academic theological degree or a D.Min, or has been honored with a D.D., it is very thoughtful and courteous to write to that friend or colleague as “The Reverend Doctor J. Doe.” They, of course, will be too modest to reply in that style, limiting their degree to initials after their name on the letterhead, but they will very much appreciate your noticing.

If using a degree is desired, in America your signature line in a letter is “(The Rev.) J. Doe, Ph.D.” and not “The Rev. Dr. J. Doe.”

If “Dr.” is used, the degree may not follow the name (“Dr. J. Doe, M.D.,” would be incorrect).

Please do not ever list the bishop as “The Rt. Rev. Dr.” in service folders. It’s just too much. Furthermore, it is useful to note that by decree of a very early General Convention, our bishops are forbidden to use titles like “Your Grace,” “My Lord,” “Your Excellency,” etc. You are accordingly asked to address the bishop simply as “Bishop.” There is a great deal to be said for this in America, where the episcopate confers no earthly lordship. And please do not kiss the ring.

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