

What are the Anglican Vestments?

• Steve Macias

A visible difference between Anglican churches and many nondenominational churches is the “robes” that Anglican ministers and altar servers wear. These ceremonial articles of clothing are like “church uniforms” and are traditionally called “Vestments” (from the Latin *vestire* “to clothe”) and carry historic and symbolic significance in the Anglican tradition.

The Anglican Vestments are commonly referred to as “Choir Dress” and are distinct from Eucharistic vestments that were common in Western and Eastern Churches at the time of the Reformation. From the 16th century until the 19th century, the Church of England did not use most of the traditional vestments like the chasuble, maniple, or stole.

Instead the Church of England reformed clergy dress to the cassock, surplice, tippet, scarf, and cope. These vestments had been worn by clergy, monastics, and academics before the Reformation. The Reformers in the Church of England had hoped to distance Anglicanism from the medieval concepts of a re-sacrificing priesthood.

Anglicanism teaches that the sacrifice of Christ is present in Holy Communion as the “one oblation of himself once offered” (1928 BCP) and not a new sacrificial act nor adding to the work of Christ’s sacrifice.

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Anglican Cassock from Almy.com

The Cassock: A full-length garment of a single color worn by certain Christian clergy, members of church choirs, acolytes, and others having some particular office or role in a church.

“Definition of Cassock”. Oxford University Press. Lexico.com. 27 July 2021. <https://www.lexico.com/definition/cassock>

The Anglican Church is a historic church that shares many Christian traditions with the wider Christian Church in the West. At the time of the Apostles, men of Rome and Judea wore long tunic-style garments to either the knees or ankles. While the casual dress has developed and changed over time, the formal dress of the Christian leading worship remained in this historic pattern. Historically, the longer ankle-length tunic was associated with modesty and also a symbol of courtly authority. As early as the 6th century, the canons of local church councils required Christian clergy to wear these ankle-length vestments.

At Saint Paul’s Anglican Church, our choir, altar servers, lay readers, and clergy all wear either black or red cassocks during prayer and worship services. Anglican canons require clergy to “usually” wear the cassock. (LXXIV; 1604 Canons of the Church of England)

The Surplice: A loose white linen vestment varying from hip-length to calf-length, worn over a cassock by clergy, acolytes, and choristers at Christian church services.

“Definition of Surplice”. Oxford University Press. Lexico.com. 27 July 2021. <https://www.lexico.com/definition/surplice>.

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*Anglican Surplice from **Almy.com***

As the church spread throughout Europe many local customs were born in regional churches. In the West, monastics would break from their labors to come and pray in the church. They would place this simple white garment over their work clothing as they went into the church. It is similar to the white “alb” worn by only the clergy during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion). And also note the white garments in Revelation 19:8.

Today, the surplice is worn over the cassock during worship services and is worn by both clergy and laity (non-clergy) who are leading or assisting in services. The Eastern Orthodox Church does not have a comparable vestment, but surplices can be seen in Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and other Western Christian traditions.

The Tippet: A long ceremonial scarf worn especially by the clergy.

“Definition of Tippet”. Oxford University Press. Lexico.com. 27 July 2021. <https://www.lexico.com/definition/tippet>.”



Anglican Tippet from Almy.com

Tippets (commonly called preaching scarves) are worn for the Daily Offices of Morning Prayer (Mattins) and Evening Prayer (Evensong). These are similar to the colored scarves called, “stoles” that are worn for the celebration, but are black and worn by clergy. The use of a tippet dates back to before the Reformation and is typically tied to university regalia like the “academic hood” as we now see conferred in graduate schools.

The academic hood is also worth mentioning as worn under the tippet representing the individual’s academic credentials. These were part of medieval academic dress and are often imitated in hooding ceremonies at American graduate schools. The “square cap” and the “canterbury cap” are also imitated by American high school and college graduation caps. Ultimately, clerical headgear is a matter of dress custom in Anglicanism. We believe that, “No man shall cover his head in the church or chapel in the Divine Service”

The Cope: A long, loose cloak worn by a priest or bishop on ceremonial occasions.

“Definition of Cope”. Oxford University Press. Lexico.com. 27 July 2021. <https://www.lexico.com/definition/cope>.”

The cope is the only eucharistic vestment that continued to be used in the Church of England over the surplice and the tippet. The 1549 Book of Common Prayer specifies that the Priest should a cope during Holy Communion, rather than the chasuble.

