Dress Standards and the Sacrament

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, General Conference, Ensign, May 1995, p. 68. May I suggest that wherever possible a white shirt be worn by the deacons, teachers, and priests who handle the sacrament. For sacred ordinances in the Church we often use ceremonial clothing, and a white shirt could be seen as a gentle reminder of the white clothing you wore in the baptismal font and an anticipation of the white shirt you will soon wear into the temple and onto your missions.

That simple suggestion is not intended to be pharisaic or formalistic. We do not want deacons or priests in uniforms or unduly concerned about anything but the purity of their lives. But how our young people dress can teach a holy principle to us all, and it certain can convey sanctity. As President David O. McKay taught, a white shirt contributes to the sacredness of the holy sacrament (see Conference Report, Oct. 1956, p. 89).

David O. McKay letter to Bishops LeGrand Richards, Joseph L. Wirthlin, Thorpe B. Isaacson, 10 Dec 1951. I have suggested one line and one word in the second paragraph, which, if you approve, will read as follows: “The wearing of white or very light pastel colored shirts is recommended for those who participate in the sacrament service. The wearing of coats and ties is always appropriate though not obligatory. This is not a step toward formality—it is only a precaution against such dress as is not in keeping with the sacredness of the sacrament service.”

The Improvement Era. Feb 1954. “Proper Dress Emphasized When Passing Sacrament.” We come again to the matter of proper dress on the part of those participating in the administration and passing of the sacrament. Surely when a young man receives the authority to participate at the sacrament table, he is old enough to recognize the essentials in proper dress for such a sacred service. For the most part, our Priests are faultless in their dress when administering the sacrament. However, in a few instances, there is evidence that more attention to this detail is needed.

Our observation is that Deacons and Teachers are most likely to be careless in this respect. And yet, to place on these young men the full responsibility for improper dress is not the thing to do. Our Deacons and Teachers will obey the instructions of leaders if instructions are given. It is feared, for the most part, little if anything is ever said by way of teaching them to dress properly when passing the sacrament.

Loud colors in shirts, sweaters, or sport coats are held to be out of order when passing the sacrament.

White shirts are always proper. Coats may or may not be worn as the individual desires. Ties are in excellent taste when they are moderate in color and free from patterns out of harmony with this sacred service. While ties should be worn, there should be no required uniformity in either style or color.

In the final analysis, a young man participating in the administration of the sacrament should be dressed neatly and clean: His shoes should be polished, his hair combed, a neat tie should be worn on a white shirt. When a coat is worn, it should be without pattern of any kind and in subdued colors.

Our handbook permits “very light pastel colored shirts.” However, this latitude seems to have been interpreted as license to wear most any color or combination at hand. If we hold to the recommendation that only white shirts be worn, there can be no misunderstanding.

Stake and ward leaders are urged to make this matter a consistent project until proper dress while participating in the administration of the sacrament becomes a habit. When our Aaronic Priesthood bearers know, in advance, how they are expected to dress when participating in this sacred service, they will come prepared, especially when participating is limited to those who are dressed becomingly.

The Messenger, No. 13, Jan 1957. “Proper Dress Noted for Sacrament Service.” Again we remind bishops, general secretaries [of the Aaronic Pr’d], and quorum advisers, that young men are to be encouraged to wear white or pastel colored shirts, with or without coats as they prefer, when passing the sacrament. Priests should always wear white shirts and, preferably, coats as well when administering at the sacrament table.

The Messenger, No. 21, Sept 1957. “White Shirts to be Worn When Administering the Sacrament.” With the approval of the First Presidency, the Presiding Bishopric recommend that all bearers of the Aaronic Priesthood who perform any duty in connection with the administration and passing of the sacrament wear white shirts and appropriate neck ties. Where coats or sweaters are worn, they should be conservative in color and wholly without exaggerated designs which may be offensive to the desired sense of dignity in the sacrament service. These instructions supercede all other instructions on this matter, including those in the current handbook.

President Harold B. Lee, General Conference, Ensign, Aug 1973, pg. 98. They should have in mind when they are acting in those capacities [as deacons, teachers, and priests] it is as though they were acting for and responsible to the Lord. When we officiate in the name of the Lord, as holders of the priesthood, we are doing it in the name and in behalf of our Heavenly Father. Priesthood is the power by which our Heavenly Father works through men, through deacons, through teachers, through priests, and I have a feeling that we are not impressing that upon our young men. They are not taking the understanding of their priesthood as seriously as they might. If they did, they would always want to appear as President Tanner said of Bishop Featherstone. They would always want to appear at their best when they are exercising their priesthood. Their hair would be properly groomed; their clothing...
and appearance would reflect the sanctity they should feel in the performance of their priesthood duties. I have had that same feeling. I have never performed an ordinance, such as administering to the sick, without first excusing myself, if I were out in the garden or somewhere, until I was properly clothed, to make the best appearance I could, because I felt in so doing I was drawing close to the Lord himself, and I want to appear at my best in his presence.

Brethren, I am afraid that some of our elders do not understand this, that when they are officiating as elders of the Church, or as seventies or as high priests, it is as though when they perform the ordinance, the Lord through them is acting upon the heads of those for whom they minister. I have often thought one of the reasons why we are not magnifying our priesthood is because we don’t understand that as holders of the priesthood, He is working through us by the power of the holy priesthood, and I would wish that we could all have that feeling, and so teach our young people what it means to hold the priesthood and to magnify it.

**Girls’ Dress**

*Vaughn J. Featherstone,* Stockholm Area Conference, pg. 75. And girls, let’s be modest in our dress—no body shirts, form-fitting, form-revealing shirts and dresses that you wear. Let’s wear our skirts long enough, where they are not a temptation to the Aaronic Priesthood. *How dare you tempt the Aaronic Priesthood of the Church!* *What a transgression that is!* You see, we know the reason you wear short skirts and these things is because you are pure in heart. [?] “I’m doing everything I can do. What difference does this make?” Do you know, it makes a great deal of difference. Please be modest in your dress.

*Church News,* 31 July 1971, pg. 16. A General Authority heard a girl express her love for the Lord in a stake conference—and yet the girl stood at the pulpit with skirts eight inches above the knee! Her appearance was entirely inconsistent with what she said. Now that any style is acceptable, surely decent women could lose nothing by being modest—and how much they would gain! And how much the world would be spared in this day of immorality and seduction!

*Church News,* 6 Dec 1969, pg. 16. How many women pretend to be spiritual and good and at the same time display their femininity with short skirts, low necks and tight clothing which puts an evil emphasis on sex?

*Paul Harvey,* “A Lawman’s View On Miniskirts,” Provo Herald, 16 April 1970. Girl’s skirts started creeping upward in 1964. The higher hemline was then most conspicuous only because it rode up when she sat down.

Simultaneously, however coincidentally, crimes against women began a dramatic increase. FBI crime files show the rate of forcible rape—which had been declining for five years—shot upward in 1964 and each year since. In England, where the short skirts had a head start, the rape rate those five recent years increased 90 percent. In the United States, the increase has been 68 percent. Last year forcible rapes increased more than any other violent crime. Is there a correlation? The consensus of law enforcement officers in 50 states is “yes.”

Women do not see miniskirts from the same point of view as men do. A girl accustomed to appearing in public in a swimsuit cannot comprehend the difference between that and the provocative promise of a possible view of intimate areas.

Professional law enforcement officials in 50 states were asked, “Does the short skirt invite sex crime?” Those in 61 percent of our major cities reported; 92 percent said yes. The juvenile division commander of one large city spoke the consensus view when he said, “Some sex crimes are committed by individuals aroused by their sensory perception, and short dresses of some girls could provoke such an attack.”

Where forcible rape is now our nation’s fastest increasing crime, a separate category of “molestation of young girls” is also increasing at a record rate. Mary Quant, London designer, mother of the miniskirt, said on Nov. 13, 1967, “Miniclothes are symbolic of those girls who want to seduce a man…” And, as if to confirm her conclusion, the years the skirts went up crimes against women demonstrated a parallel increase.

This analysis, compiled by Hollywood Social Studies and analyzed by Chief of Police Duane Baker of Glendale, Calif., presumes to draw no conclusion beyond the survey’s findings and the FBI’s statistics. New York City presently averages five reported forcible rapes per day. Los Angeles, with a third the population, also has five a day. San Francisco’s rate is up more than 200 percent in one year, as is Cleveland’s.

Most rapists are age 18. Of the lawmen surveyed, 83 percent agreed: “A normally sexed young man will be more likely to think in the direction of overt sex activity by the striptease effects of a short skirt wearer, seated, than by any other public fashion in history.” Yet many women cannot imagine that it could ever be improper—or even dangerous—to follow fashion.

**Returned Missionaries**

*Spencer W. Kimball,* Ensign, March 1980, pg. 2. I assure you that all Church standards, both those relating to moral conduct and those relating to dress and grooming, are the result of intense, prayerful consideration by Church leaders. Young adults whose clean-cut appearance demonstrates that they feel no need to follow after the pattern of the world—which often revels in filth and disorder and garish fads… We are affected by our own outward appearances; we tend to fill roles.

*Spencer W. Kimball,* Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, pg. 592-593. You are nineteen years old when you are called; maybe you will be seventy nine when you die. In those sixty years, what a powerful influence you can bear. And you must do it! You must do it because it will be a wasted life, to a degree, if any one of you go home and let your hair grow and wear sloppy clothes and do ordinary things and break the Sabbath or any other of the laws of God…. the Lord knew what he was….
doing when he impressed the Brethren to have you be neat and tidy and clean in the mission field…. Returned missionaries should continue neat grooming. Sometimes we find a returned missionary who lets his hair grow long immediately. He is very anxious to become part of the world again. He has been free of the world for a couple of years, now he would like to taste that “sweet” world, if you can call it that. We find that some young men who return home from their missions put on their overalls the very first day they get home, and that old sweater that was ready to throw away before they left. They like to put on all those things. It always pleases me when I go to a community and I see the returned missionaries still well dressed, well groomed, and have their testimony and are eager to give the message that they had been teaching all those years…. I want you to know it is hard for me to be disappointed, and I rejoice in the blessings of the Lord daily. But a few things disappoint me occasionally and one of them is the returned missionary who, after two years of taking great pride in how he looks and what he represents, returns to this campus or some other place to see how quickly he can let his hair grow, how fully he can develop a moustache and long sideburns and push to the very margins of appropriate grooming, how clumsy his shoes get, how tattered his clothes,… how close to being grubby he can get without being refused admittance to the school. That, my young returned missionary brethren, is one of the great disappointments in my life.

Harold B. Lee, Welfare Agricultural Mtg, 8 April 1972, 7:30 a.m. … the next thing one of the young men said was—this one man had rather long hair down over his shoulder—“Brother Lee, do you think I ought to cut my hair?” And I said, “Well now, you said that Brother [Robert L.] Simpson was your favorite General Authority. Why don’t you take him for a model? Look how he cuts his hair. Look how he dresses. See how he deports himself. Wouldn’t you like to be like Brother Simpson?” He said, “Then you mean you are over his shoulder—”Brother Lee, do you think I ought to cut my hair?” And I said, “That’s what I’m trying to say to you.” And he said, “I’ll do it right now.”

Harold B. Lee, Manchester Area Conference, Ensign, November 1971, pg. 14. The gospel of Jesus Christ does have the answers to the problems that afflict the world, whether it be in the youth area, whether it be in public life, the social customs and manners, the standards as laid down in the church and kingdom of God, and the methods by which those standards can be maintained…. As we see the hideous dress standards among the men and women, as we learn of the terrifying portrayal of filth and rot in entertainment places, we say, as we said to the brethren last night: Never go to any place that you wouldn’t take your priesthood with you. Stay out of such places. Someone said, when you find a place that is labeled “adults only: no children or youth allowed,” no adults should be allowed either, if you will be safe from the pitfalls of the devil. We are members whom the Lord expects to be a light unto the world, and to set a standard for people to seek to it.

As we see the lewd demonstrations of dress, I am reminded of what a man said to one of our brethren—President Anthony W. Ivins of the First Presidency—who was over in the Hawaiian Islands, where we first saw the lewd exposure of those who were bathing in the surf. This businessman said, “Mr. Ivins, in the world where I come from, any woman who displays herself in nude or seminude clothing is inviting rape.”

Now you sisters, because the world is setting a fashion of lewd dress than makes for lewd exposure, may I plead with you to keep yourselves sacred, and not let your dress be an invitation to those who are wicked or those who look with wicked glance upon your person. As in former times, there may be many who take offense at what to them may seem hard things, and they are prone to turn away and walk no more with us.

Arthur Henry King, “The Idea of a Mormon University,” Out of the Abundance of the Heart, pg. 271; BYU Studies 13:2, Winter 1973. But we are so much like other universities, and we are striving so much to be like other universities, that if we are not careful we may share in the moral decline. That decline is discernible at BYU in the unwillingness of students to follow dress standards, directly against their word and promise, and in the reasons they give for not following them. It is discernible on the occasions when students cheat and I the reasons they give for cheating. (I understand some of them have had the effrontery to give reasons for cheating.) It is there in the obscene (and obscenely advertised) rock concerts, some given under the auspices of ASBYU. It is there, most pervasively of all, in the obsession with grades and the superficial success that they represent, in the triviality and inane conformity of so many that chase straight A's.

Remain Seated

President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor, Ensign, May 1987, pg. 46. At the conclusion of the administration of the sacrament, it is not uncommon for the priests and even the deacons to leave their places and scatter all over the chapel. Possibly the bench on which the priests sit is not comfortable. If so, perhaps space could be reserved on the front row to which they could quietly move at the conclusion of the sacrament service.

The Messenger, No. 34, Nov-Dec 1958. Deacons Not To Leave Seats After Sacrament. Bearers of the Aaronic Priesthood who administer or pass the sacrament should not leave their assigned seats when they have finished the sacrament service. There is an unnecessary disturbance when, following the administration of the sacrament, young men immediately go to other areas of the meetinghouse to find seats.


Dear Brethren:

In an increasing number of wards, some Aaronic Priesthood members are forming the habit of walking
out of the meeting as soon as they have finished passing the sacrament.

It appears to us that this is a rather bold, though perhaps thoughtless exhibition of disrespect for the house of the Lord and a most unworthy example on the part of those participating in this sacred ordinance.

We feel that those administering and passing the sacrament should remain in their appointed seats rather than getting up and walking to another part of the chapel when the passing of the sacrament is ended. At least, where this movement is permitted, those participating should be cautioned to proceed quietly in moving from one place to another.

All matters pertaining to the administration and passing of the sacrament, including the behavior of those officiating, should be given careful and constant attention by the bishopric.

If this infraction is practiced in your ward, we urge you to correct it without delay. Our sacrament service should always be conducted and administered in keeping with the dignity of its sacred purpose.

The Right Hand

The Messenger, No. 62, August 1961. “Use of Right Hand in Partaking of Sacrament.” The right hand should be used when partaking of the sacrament. The use of the right hand is a symbol of righteousness; and is not only a well-established custom in the performing of ordinances in the Church, but also has received divine sanction. Encouragement should be given where necessary to continue this practice.

For additional information on the subject of using the right hand, read Answers to Gospel Questions, Volume 1, Page 151, by Joseph Fielding Smith.

Passing Procedure with Multiple Quorums

The Improvement Era, Feb 1954. Under instructions from the First Presidency to the Presiding Bishopric, Aaronic Priesthood bearers who pass the bread during the sacrament service are to pass the water as well. Any practice of having one quorum pass the bread and another quorum pass the water is out of harmony with instructions now coming from the First Presidency and should be discontinued.

Breaking the Bread—Dripping Water Trays

The Messenger, No. 29, May 1958. “Avoid Breaking Sacrament Bread Too Small.” Those officiating at the sacrament table should be instructed to break the bread in fair sized pieces. Too often, bread is broken almost into crumbs.

Bread should be broken lightly to avoid a crushed or “pinched” appearance.

Some of the difficulty may arise from trying to make a limited amount of bread serve a larger crowd than anticipated. This possibly should always be guarded against by providing sufficient bread at all times to take care of unexpected crowds. It is better to have unused bread on hand at the end of the service than to either run out of bread or try to make a limited supply go too far.

There is nearly as much room for improvement in the preparation and breaking of the bread as there is in avoiding the dripping water trays when administering the sacrament.

The Messenger, No. 7, July 1956. “Bishops—Instruct Priests in Breaking Bread.” Those who administer the sacrament should be instructed in the breaking of the bread so as to make its appearance more acceptable to those who partake of it.

It has come to our attention that the bread is often crumbled or broken into very small pieces and gives a stinted appearance in the tray. It frequently happens that the bread is not broken into distinct pieces and when a piece is picked up it pulls another attached piece with it. It is also noted that the Priests in breaking the bread pinch it between their fingers making it soggy and less palatable.

We urge ward bishops to instruct those who officiate at the sacrament table as to proper procedures in the breaking of the bread. If necessary, it could be demonstrated how the bread can be broken into separate, uniform, fair sized pieces without being pinched or crushed. Such instruction should occasionally be given to the Priests.

The Messenger, June 1957. “Dripping Water Trays Objectionable In Sacrament Service.” Dripping water trays are very annoying and give every evidence of both thoughtlessness and carelessness in the preparation of the sacrament table.

Clothes have had to be sent to the cleaners after a sacrament service because of dripping water. This is most unfortunate. Trays should be scrupulously clean of all surplus water before being placed on the sacrament table.

This objectionable matter can be overcome if water cups are filled individually with fresh water from a pitcher with a small spout instead of carelessly placing the entire tray under the spickett [sic—spigot] and, while filling the cups, splash water all over the vessels only to have it drip on clothing while the water is being passed. Of course, it takes time to fill cups individually from a pitcher but is any time better spent than in properly preparing the sacrament?

We respectfully urge bishoprics to watch this detail and overcome any carelessness in the preparation of water trays for the sacrament service.

The Messenger, No. 28, April 1958. “More Care Urged In Preparation Of The Sacrament.” We are increasingly apprehensive over reports of irreverence and lack of cleanliness in some wards in the preparation of the sacrament trays before they are placed on the sacrament table. [Bold in original.]

Not a few reports, including some personal inspections and observations, disclose the need for the training and education of our young men in the sacredness of this duty. Too often, there are evidences of boisterous and
indifference which suggest a lack of understanding and reverence in the preparation of trays and their contents for the sacrament service.

*We are still not taking care of the dripping-water problem as we should in a majority of cases observed. When water trays are placed on the sacrament table there is no reason why even one drop of water, outside of the cups, should be in evidence. Again we respectfully ask bishoprics, general secretaries, and quorum advisers to correct this condition wherever it exists.* [Italics in original.]

Often, neither the general secretary [of the Aaronic Priesthood] nor quorum adviser is present to see what is going on. At least one of these officers, and preferably both, should be present to supervise those preparing the trays and the sacrament table.

Quorum presidencies have a responsibility to set the proper example and to assist their quorum members in the becoming discharge of this responsibility.

Bishoprics are urged to take a greater personal interest in this matter wherever these allegations reflect the truth.

It is not the duty of custodians or women to prepare either the sacrament trays or the sacrament table. This is a responsibility to be accepted and performed, under supervision, by the Aaronic Priesthood.

**Noisy Water Trays**


Dear Brethren:

There has been some concern since the introduction of plastic Sacrament cups about the noise created as they are dropped into the Sacrament tray after being used.

Many wards have discovered that a damp paper towel in the bottom of the tray can be effective in reducing the sound factor.

Bird Plastics, the manufacturer of this new cup, has offered to furnish each ward with soundproofing materials without cost. This material consists of a sponge rubber stripping with a mastic covered backing which can be adhered to the ridges holding the handle in place, plus a thin corrugated plastic sheet to be placed over the flat area of the tray.