

## CONTINUED...

## Dress

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However, Father Daniel F. Holland, the current pastor, said he now considers St. Theodore's to be a "very informal parish" where an abundance of worshippers opt for shorts in the summer. The trend, he noted, began under his predecessor, the late Father Gerald Dunn, who served as pastor from 1968 to 1992.

Father Holland added that he would never attempt to censor his parishioners' style of dress.

"I kind of like the spirit of the place. I let people use their own judgment," he said.

The overall shift toward less formalized attire, Bishop Hickey feels, accelerated when Saturday-evening liturgies began in this diocese in the early 1970s.

"People were coming in off the golf courses," he said.

"They used that Saturday Mass as a matter of convenience," Workmaster noted. "People were inclined to come from whatever activity they were engaged in."

Workmaster pointed out that changes in the workplace have also influenced church attire. For instance, she said that many office policy-makers who once forbade women to wear slacks now permit this practice. In addition, many businesses allow dress-down days on Fridays.

By the same token, Bishop Hickey doesn't think societal trends should give Catholics license to wear whatever they please at Mass. For example, he noted that Protestant denominations with predominantly black populations place a priority on formal worship attire.

"My observation is that they have always dressed well for church. It's very noticeable," Bishop Hickey said.

While a comparatively relaxed dress style is employed by many Catholics, Workmaster stressed that such a practice should not extend to those in designated liturgical positions.

"We always say, 'The way to come is how you would go to a nice occasion,'" Workmaster said. She added that this sen-



timent is expressed as "a strong suggestion" but not an official policy.

As the mercury rises, so apparently does this issue. Several diocesan parishes run bulletin notices about proper attire during the summer months, reminding parishioners not to dress too casually.

Some parishes, such as St. Mary's in Canandaigua and Holy Cross in Rochester, are explicit with their guidelines.

"Short shorts, tank-tops and other such attire are totally out of place for church," the June 23 St. Mary's bulletin stated.

"While people can dress casually during the summer, beach wear should not be considered appropriate dress," the June 29-30 Holy Cross bulletin noted.

Father Walter L. Wainwright, pastor of St. Mary's, said this is the first year he has run a bulletin notice about attire. He explained that the action was prompted by his observation of a recent rise in casual clothing.

"Some people were throwing on shorts and T-shirts, the same as they'd be wearing to the beach," he remarked.

Father Wainwright said he didn't feel

the matter was so urgent that it needed to be addressed from the pulpit. Yet he also noted that he would take more direct action if, for instance, members of the congregation were wearing shirts displaying offensive language.

The Canandaigua pastor added that "people have been a little more careful" in the weeks since the bulletin notice ran.

A bulletin announcement from St. James Church in Rochester is less specific regarding attire, but shares the same sentiment.

"Our need for comfort should not overshadow a greater need to dress appropriately for the reverence due our liturgy," the July 14 notice read.

The St. James statement raises a key question: How can one gauge what is appropriate when there isn't a detailed set of rules to follow?

"You have to appeal to people's understanding of what is appropriate," Workmaster replied. "They have to figure that out for themselves. What would you wear in a church as opposed to a beach, picnic or nightclub?"

Patricia Barron, for one, considers her attire at Mass to be as important as that at any other social outing she attends.

"I wear shorts above the knee, but I wear them around the house — not when I go to church," said Barron, a parishioner in the Northern Cayuga Cluster, Cayuga County. "There's a time and a place for everything. If you went visiting someone, you wouldn't dress obnoxiously."

The *Courier* photo of Jennifer bothered Barron because she originally thought it was of an adult woman. When Barron was told Jennifer's age, she softened her stance slightly.

"Those shorts don't look too bad for a 14-year-old," she said.

At the same time, Barron stated, "I wouldn't allow my kids to wear (shorts), and I raised five girls and a niece."

Yet as far as Elaine Neenan is concerned, she saw absolutely no problem with her daughter's attire.

"Who wants to sit there and squirm?" Elaine Neenan commented. "If your mind's thinking about the heat, it's not

thinking about what you're there for."

She noted that Jennifer's outfit was brand-new, and added that Jennifer has been an altar server for six years at St. Rose and is involved in many parish and diocesan youth activities.

Father James F. Doyle, pastor of St. Rose, feels that these are the truly important issues.

"This is one of the finest families in the parish. I'm very happy to see that young female people are serving in the church," Father Doyle remarked.

Johan Engstrom, youth-ministry coordinator at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Rochester, said that he does not attempt to encourage dress codes with the youth of his parish.

"Sometimes we get stuck on 'Can't they understand how to dress' instead of rejoicing that they're there," Engstrom commented.

"I don't want to have a dress code and have people stay away. That's the last thing I'd want to do," added Sister Patricia Flass, SSJ, who serves as pastoral associate at St. Helen's Church in Gates.

Sister Flass pointed out that Jesus Christ didn't seem preoccupied with stylish wear. "He wore sandals. He didn't ever make a big deal out of it," she remarked.

The most important factor, stated Father John J. Philipps, is that people who attend Mass are there to honor God.

"We should try to look at their hearts, and at what they're doing," said Father Philipps, the pastor of St. Bridget/St. Joseph Church in Bloomfield.

Bishop Hickey agreed with that view, saying that although he dislikes casual attire for Mass, he doesn't perceive this style of dress as an act of rebellion.

"I don't want to come across as being condemning," Bishop Hickey said. "The last thing these people would intend to be is disrespectful."

"We're always going to live in that tension of wanting to have the best eucharistic liturgies and bringing our best to them, but also remembering that liturgical hospitality says all are welcome — no matter how you're dressed," Workmaster acknowledged.

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