

GARMENTS

Members who have received their temple ordinances thereafter wear the special garment or underclothing. Garments are provided by an agency of the Church – and are generally available to members throughout the world through a distribution program operated by the Church.

The garment represents sacred covenants. It fosters modesty and becomes a shield and protection to the wearer. The wearing of such a garment does not prevent members from dressing in the fashionable clothing generally worn in the nations of the world. Only clothing that is immodest or extreme in style would be incompatible with wearing the garment.

A member of the Church was once invited to speak to the faculty and staff of the Navy Chaplains Training School in Newport, Rhode Island. The audience included a number of high-ranking, naval chaplains from the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish faiths. In the question-and-answer period, one of the chaplains asked, “Can you tell us something about the special underwear that some Mormon servicemen wear?” The implication was, “Why do you do that? Isn’t it strange? Doesn’t that present a problem?”

To the chaplain who made the inquiry, he responded with a question: “Which church do you represent?” In response, the chaplain named one of the Protestant churches. He said, “In civilian life and also when conducting the meetings in the military service, you wear clerical clothing, do you not?” The chaplain said that he did.

He continued: “I would suppose that that has some importance to you, that in a sense it sets you apart from the rest of the congregation. It is your uniform, as it were, of the ministry. Also, I suppose it may have a much more important place.

It reminds you of who you are and what your obligations and covenants are. It is a continual reminder that you are a member of the clergy, that you regard yourself as a servant of the Lord, and that you are responsible to live in such a way as to be worthy of your ordination.”

He then told them: “You should be able to understand at least one of our reasons why Latter-day Saints have a deep spiritual commitment concerning the garment. A major difference between your churches and ours is that we do not have a professional clergy, as you do. The congregations are all presided over by local leaders. They are men called from all walks of life. Yet they are ordained to the priesthood. They hold offices in the priesthood. They are set apart to presiding positions as presidents, counselors, and leaders in various categories. The women, too, share in that responsibility and in those obligations. The man who heads our congregation on Sunday as the bishop may go to work on Monday as a postal clerk, as an office worker, a farmer, or a doctor. By our standard, he is as much an ordained minister as you are by your standard. He is recognized as such by most governments. We draw something of the same benefits from this special clothing as you would draw from your clerical vestments. The difference is that we wear ours under our clothing instead of outside, for we are employed in various occupations in addition to our service in the Church. These sacred things we do not wish to parade before the world.”

The garment, covering the body, is a visual and tactile reminder of covenants made in the temple. For many Church members, the garment has formed a barrier of protection when the wearer has been faced with temptation. Among other things, it symbolizes our deep respect for the laws of God – among them the moral standard.