



How to dress like a bishop

By John La Boone

In The Episcopal Church we have many cultural elements that have been passed down through the centuries. That includes the use of clerical vestments, the articles of clothing that distinguish our deacons, priests and bishops.

Bishops share some of the same vestments with priests, such as the clerical collar and the stole that is worn when celebrating communion or hearing confessions. But one of the most distinctive and recognizable bishops' vestments is the tall, folding headgear that rises to a double-point, known as a mitre, worn for ceremonial purposes. The word *mitre* is derived from Greek and actually means "turban" or "headband." It is thought that the style of mitres is traceable to pagan times and is similar to the headgear worn by the kings of ancient Persia and Assyria.

Historians are not entirely sure how long the bishop's mitre has been in use in the Church. Some think it goes back to the age of the Apostles. Others trace it back to the 8th- or 9th-centuries. Still others believe it came into use a little before or a little after the year 1000 A.D. In the 11th-century it was first depicted in Church art and it was first mentioned in a Church document in 1049. That probably gives a pretty good indicator of when the mitre became commonly used by bishops, although it may have roots that go farther back in history.

The mitre is also used by bishops, cardinals and some abbots in the Roman Catholic Church, and is worn by some Lutheran bishops. The mitre in the Eastern Orthodox Churches is shaped differently. It is normally a high, dome-shaped sort of hat that swells outward toward the top rather than reducing to a point. It is crossed by two diagonal bands and can be topped by a small cross that is either vertical or laying flat on top of the mitre's dome. Similar mitres are used by bishops in the Coptic Churches.

Mitres may be simple and white but they also come in all the liturgical colors and there is an enormous variety of ornamentation and symbols used on many of them. I have seen mitres advertised for as little as \$150 but they usually cost several hundred dollars and can easily go for more than \$1,000.

In 2010, The Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, our then-presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church, was the guest celebrant and preacher at Southwark Cathedral in London. On that occasion, she was forbidden by then-Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams to wear her mitre. At that point the Church of England had ordained female priests but had not taken the step of consecrating female bishops, and Williams was concerned that many in the CoE would totally freak out if they had to see a woman wearing a mitre. Presiding Bishop Jefferts Schori graciously carried her mitre, in full view, instead of wearing it and simply focused on what she was there to do, which was to preach and celebrate communion. It took them a few more years but the CoE now has women bishops and is much richer for that. Unsurprisingly, no one died of shock when a woman wore a pointy hat for the first time in England.

The cope is a long cloak, open at the front, that can be worn by any rank of clergy but is usually associated with bishops. If a bishop wears one, it should also be accompanied by wearing the mitre. The cope is fastened by a band or clasp. Bishop's copes are usually highly ornamented. A bishop may also wear a rochet for public prayer or the administration of the sacraments. It is a long white tunic that is gathered at the wrists by wide purple cloth cinctures.

Bishops wear purple shirts and sashes. Traditionally purple is a color associated with royalty and therefore one who leads the people. A bishop's ring is amethyst, which is also purple. It symbolizes faithfulness and truth and is worn on the ring finger of the right hand. The Biblical Greek word for bishop is *epískopos*, meaning "overseer" or "guardian."

The bishop's pectoral cross is a large-ish cross hung around the neck from a chain or cord. It is made of gold, silver or platinum and sometimes has precious or semiprecious stones fashioned into it. This cross displayed against the chest is intended to show that God is close to the bishop's heart.

Another highly visible symbol of being a bishop is the crosier or shepherd's crook. It is the long staff that is curved over at the top which indicates that the one who carries it is the shepherd of God's flock. The crosier is always used when the bishop is in procession and in certain other ceremonial settings. The symbolism is that the straight end is used to goad the spiritually lazy and the crooked end is for drawing back those who stray from the faith. The staff itself is a reminder that the bishop is a firm support for the faithful. Crosiers may vary from being a no-frills wooden staff to one that is made out of metal and greatly ornamented.

Bibles are also associated with bishops in the Anglican Communion. Bishops receive a Bible at their consecrations which gives them authority to build up the Church.

There are various companies that specialize in providing church vestments including bishops' regalia. For examples of what is offered, visit: www.wippell.com.