

# The Cassock or Soutane



The Cassock, is a long garment which may be worn by Roman Catholic and other clergy both as ordinary dress and under liturgical garments. The cassock, also sometimes called a soutane has a front opening much like a long coat, long sleeves and fits the body closely. There are usually 33 buttons which are thought to be symbolic of the life of Jesus.

In the Roman Catholic church the colour and trim vary with the ecclesiastical rank of the wearer: the pope wears plain white, cardinals black with scarlet trim, archbishops and bishops black with red trim, and lesser clergy plain black. In choir and church ceremonies the pope wears a white silk cassock; cardinals wear scarlet, except in penitential seasons when they wear purple; and lesser clergy wear plain black.

While many priests wear the traditional cassock for Mass, the distribution of Holy Communion, or in performing other priestly duties around the parish, a regular suit with clerical collar or a clerical shirt have become common place.

The symbolism of the cassock is as follows:

The Roman collar symbolizes obedience; the sash or cincture around the waist, chastity; and the colour black, poverty. Moreover, black is a colour of mourning and death; for the priest, the symbolism is dying to oneself to rise and to serve the Lord as well as giving witness of the Kingdom yet to come.