

DEAR DEACON BULLETIN INSERT

❖ **Dear Deacon Jim,**

Why does a priest or a deacon wear a white collar and when did this become part of their attire?

❖ **Response**

The white-collar, known as the "Roman collar," is a sign of the person's religious calling and helps others outside of the church in the community to identify them. This white-collar, outside of the vestments worn at mass, remains one of the most distinctive elements of clerical attire.

Spiritually it has become representative of a priest's consecration to God and his role as someone set apart for priestly service. Clerics (Priests and Deacons) see it as a symbol of their "slavery" to God, showing the world who is their true Master.

Additionally, the collar remains a distinctive sign of the priest's and deacon's availability and the permanent nature of Holy Orders.

Canon law of the Catholic Church states that "clerics are to wear a suitable ecclesiastical dress, in accordance with the norms established by the Episcopal Conference and legitimate local custom" (n. 284). In the United States, bishops at the 1884 Council of Baltimore decided that priests should wear black, preferably cassocks along with the white Roman collar.

Regarding the "when" portion of the question, it is believed that the collar evolved from men's attire in Europe and included linen collars and scarves folded over jacket collars protecting them from daily wear and soil. The clergy wore similar collars.

In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council decided that clergy should not dress extravagantly as most people of any stature did at that time. As the average gentleman's collar became more elaborate and decorated with silk embroidery, some priests followed the styles. Pope Urban VIII, in 1624, issued an edict that lace, embroidery, and ribbons were forbidden on clerical collars. Then again around 1725, Pope Benedict XIII ordered priests not to wear any form of lay attire.

After the reforms of Vatican II, suits became more common. In 1999, the U.S. bishops issued a directive that, outside of liturgical functions, a black suit and Roman collar should be the clerical apparel for ordained clerics (Priests/ Ordained Clerics are allowed leisure clothes as well when appropriate).

Deacon Jim