

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

When I was growing up kids had “school clothes” “play clothes” and “church clothes”. School attire was smart casual: neat pants and a button down shirt. Play clothes were jeans and T shirts and shorts in the summer. Church clothes? Girls wore dresses or skirts. Boys wore long pants, jacket and tie. Nobody established a dress code. It was simply the way things were.

Standards of dress have changed since then. Therefore, over the summer there has been some discussion on social media and in the parish about proper attire at Mass.

The more formally minded expressed the view that summertime casual clothes are inappropriate for church. Shorts, flip flops, halter tops and tank tops being named specifically as “not church clothes”. The more casual minded pointed out that it is better that folks come to church informally dressed than not at all.

Where’s the balance? On the one hand we want to encourage good and reverent behavior in church and the way we dress does affect the way we behave. On the other hand we don’t want to be legalistic and exclude people simply because of the way they dress.

To help answer the question we should avoid strict dress codes, but ask ourselves about the “attitude of our attire”. Whether we like it or not, our clothes make a statement about what we believe about ourselves, our values and our faith.

Instead of an arbitrary dress code for Mass, I ask that we all think carefully about how we dress for Mass. Are our clothes immodest or inappropriate? Girls and ladies, are bare shoulders, plunging necklines, short shorts and short skirts really necessary to keep cool? We have air conditioning.

Boys and men: do shorts, T shirts and flip flops represent your dignity as a Catholic man and the reverence you have in your heart for the Lord?

Please do not dismiss this pastor’s letter with the usual, “It doesn’t really matter. God looks at the heart.” That’s true, and we don’t judge anyone by their attire. On the other hand, it doesn’t hurt to ask these questions and work together to maintain high standards for our worship and life together.

Your Pastor,  
Fr. Longenecker