

The Alb - Further Guidelines

The ecumenical alb is a garment which may be worn by anyone with responsibilities of leadership in liturgy, whether ordained or not. Its colour is white, off-white or cream; 'alb' means 'white' (cf. albino, albumen). The alb is commonly used across a number of churches, including the Uniting Church, and provides the Church with an ecumenical and inclusive form of clothing. Related papers on this website deal with various aspects of liturgical wear; here, we wish to look at two issues that have arisen in recent times. These concern the wearing of the alb on the hotter parts of our country, and the alb as a garment which may appropriately be worn by men or women.

Australia covers a vast area, and in many parts is quite warm for much of the year. Objections have been raised about the alb on the grounds of impracticability for our climate. It is true that it may be quite hot in an alb, if a heavier material is used and the wearer is wearing too much underneath. However, there are ways of moderating the heat.

Cooler materials are readily available; the best is *Lustaline*, which can be obtained in white or cream. It hangs very well, and travels without creasing. There is a cheaper polycotton fabric; but it is not as cool, it does not hang as well, and creases considerably. The prices at August 2001 are: \$290 (*Lustaline*) or \$225 (polycotton), fully made up at Pellegrini's in Brisbane; their price per metre is \$7.50 (polycotton) or \$23.27 (*Lustaline*), and approx. 4 m. is needed to make up an alb for an 'average' person.

What is worn underneath does not show through these fabrics, unless the colours of the other clothes are too strong. It is possible to wear less under the alb, without necessarily just being in one's underwear. For example, shorts, shirt and sandals for men, or light clothing for women, are perfectly acceptable. One could always change into other clothes after the service if desired.

A cincture (girdle) may be worn with the alb. It is by no means necessary, and it is cooler not to wear a cincture.

One of the advantages of the alb is that it is an inclusive garment, and any particular alb should be able to be worn by both men and women. The use of necklines, hemlines or ornamentation suitable for one gender but not the other is discouraged; this detracts from the symbolism of the alb as the baptismal robe which clothes those who in Christ, where there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28).