

## **Q. What are the vestments all about that we see worn by worship leaders?**

### **Part II: The Stole**

The stole is the colourfully-decorated ‘scarf’ that the clergy wear on Sundays when we are leading worship. It is the vestment that signifies a person’s ordination to a specific ministry in God’s church. A deacon wears her stole crossed and tied at the side. Priests wear our stoles hanging around our neck.

The word ‘stole’ comes from the Latin word ‘*stola*’ or Greek word ‘*stole*’ and means ‘garment’ or ‘array’ or ‘equipment.’ It wasn’t until the 7<sup>th</sup> century that its use was universal through the church as the symbolic vestment of the clergy, and there are a variety of theories as to how the tradition developed – some say it is a derivative of the Jewish prayer shawl, although the prevailing theory is that it was adopted from the scarf of office among Imperial officers of the Roman empire. Regardless of its origin, it is seen as a symbol of service, of the towel Jesus wore and used to wash his disciples’ feet, of the yoke of Christ that we take on as Christians, a yoke that is gentle and generous. This prayer is printed and hangs on the inside of my office closet, a prayer that I use when vesting for worship:

*O Lord, your yoke is easy and burden light.*

*Grant that I may so carry this responsibility as to be worthy of your eternal grace. Amen.*

Of course, it is not just the clergy, the ordained, who take on this yoke and this service, it is all of us as Christians. But the clergy of the church are given the responsibility within the church to hold this ministry before everyone, to teach and remind and nourish the entire congregation in doing this work. In reality, then, the stole is a vestment in which we all share, a reminder for the entire Body of Christ of who we are and whose we are.

The stole in and of itself is a symbol. But the stole is also a canvas for symbols. Most of the stoles that I have, for example, are hand-made, one of a kind, pieces of art, and they are a means by which meaning can be expressed using colour, fabric, and signs of our Christian faith. In this simple vestment, with its humble message, artists throughout the centuries have spoken with beauty and creativity something of our experience of the living God.

On that note, you can watch during the season of Advent for one of my favourite stoles. It was made for me by my aunt, Linda Finn, an artist living in Elliot Lake, for my ordination. It was her idea to design an Advent stole which took the Advent wreath as the inspiration for its design. The stole is comprised of interwoven pieces of deep blue, the colour of Advent, but with each successive Sunday in Advent, one of the panels is lifted, revealing a message inscribed in gold. Throughout Advent, then, the stole mirrors our worship, becoming brighter as we progress toward Christmas.

My Advent stole is one of the more elaborately creative, even playful, examples of this vestment. But even in its simplest manifestation, the stole is one more way in which our worship engages our senses in leading us to more deeply know God's truth and love.

