

# Alleluia

# Dove

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ALLELUIA COMMUNITY  
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## Heart and Hemlines: Thoughts on Dress in an Alternate Society

By Kelly Dolin



If you give a talk about time management, you're sure to forget your mother's birthday or overlook a dental appointment. If you give a talk about marriage, you're sure to find yourself in a major tiff with

your spouse. So what happens if you're asked to delve into the murky waters of modesty?

The other day I stopped for gas. I had left a funeral and knew I needed to fuel up

before heading to Dearing. I have two black skirts – one for winter and a lighter weight, flouncier one that works great in warmer weather, but not necessarily in windy weather.

And you can guess where I'm going with this.

I'm pumping gas with one hand and holding my skirt down with the other and really wishing I had a third hand to assist me. And, actually, I was thinking of Kate Middleton's recent, ummm, wardrobe malfunction.

Let me start with a confession: I love the British royal family. As I'm checking out at the grocery store, I can overlook all the tabloids — don't care if Jennifer Aniston is engaged, don't care how much weight Kirstie Alley has lost or gained, wholly uninterested in whether Hillary Clinton has one head or three.

But splash a photo of Prince George and his fat cheeks, and I'm simply compelled to read. Lately Prince George has been overshadowed by his mother who got caught in a gust of wind in front of a bevy of photographers. We all have our moments, although, I must say, with all the staff at the disposal of the royal family, you'd think there would be one brave soul willing to take the Duchess of Cambridge aside and

### Legionaries of Christ Deaconate Ordination



**Conferred by His Excellency Rev. Monsignor Fernando Vérguez Alzaga, secretary of the Governorate of the Vatican State, on the 29th of June, Solemnity of the Apostles Peter and Paul**



Son of Full Covenant members, Bob and Alice Alger, Paul Alger making his promise of obedience to the Holy Father, the local Bishop and his own superiors.

On behalf of all those who were ordained, Paul extends their warmest heart-felt gratitude for all your prayers. God willing, on December 13th, these deacons and those who have been ordained elsewhere will meet again in Rome for their priestly ordination.

The reception of the symbol of the Deaconate, the Book of the Gospels



# Deference is Growing in Holiness

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say one simple word: underwear.

We think of Queen Elizabeth as the very model of comportment — the suits, the hats, the purses. But apparently she, too, encountered an unwanted gust of wind or two in her youth. She reportedly has tiny lead weights sewn into the hem of her outfits. Would that we all had the royal seamstress at our disposal and a generous wardrobe budget like the Queen's.

We may not have titles or an entourage of ladies in waiting, but let's begin by acknowledging who we are: We are all daughters of a King. God Almighty, the King of the Universe, has called us by name, has great plans for us, plans full of hope. He has bought us for a price.

Tim and Sean Sullivan were leaving for Boy Scout camp the other day and my parting words were, "Remember who you are." And then I added, "Remember whose you are."

In all things we need to remember whose we are.

A month or so back, the Dove ran an article on dress at prayer meetings. Here's a little background on this. When the Elders returned from their retreat, they asked the Pastoral Team to draft guidelines for dress at our prayer meetings. That's all it is. The Elders are not telling us what to wear to the pool, in our backyards, in our kitchens. When we come together on Thursday nights for the purpose of praise and worship, they would like us to respect those standards. In keeping with our current theme of Building an Alternate Society, they would like us to reflect on the broader category of dress.

I feel safer talking about Dress because everyone seems to recoil when the word Modesty is mentioned. Just to be safe, we'll just call it the M word.

We avoid the M word like a power outage in June. We confront Modesty every time we open our closet door, pull into the mall, or click into on-line shopping cart, but we don't want to talk about it.

Why is this so taboo? The short answer is that we don't agree.

Really, this shouldn't be too terribly surprising. Let's go back to Genesis. Adam

and Eve ate the apple and what did they do next? They got dressed. They were naked and ashamed, and they got dressed. And it's been causing trouble ever since. The devil is all over this, and let's never overlook that point.

But the devil is just part of the problem. What are some other issues? In talking about dress with a variety of women and men over the past few weeks, I've come up with these, all of which I can see working in my own life:

1. **Mindlessness** – Many times we don't give a second thought to what we're doing. We're in a hurry. We're on auto-pilot. We just don't think.

2. **Casualness** – A casual spirit says, "What's the big deal? You're really going to make an issue of *that*?" The more I reflected on this, the more insidious it seemed. This spirit makes every standard we hold appear ridiculous.

3. **Rebellion** – This spirit says, "Nobody's going to tell me (or my daughter or my wife) how to dress."

4. **Uncharitableness** – I'm sure there's a better term for this spirit that says, "It's your problem, not mine."

5. **Surrender** – Particularly with regard to children, we sometimes say, "It's not worth the fight." We cave in, not because we've reconsidered an issue, but out of sheer exhaustion.

6. **Woundedness** – Most of us have baggage when it comes to complicated issues of dress and body image.

7. **Logistics** – It takes hard work to find the longer shorts, to sew the straps on the dress. Our children sprout up overnight. We get heavier. It takes more money than we can afford, more time than we have.

But here we are in Alleluia Community working hard to build an alternate society. How do we combat these obstacles? Here are a few solutions:

## Solution #1 - Deference

We don't agree on many issues. Alcohol is one example. We don't serve alcohol at community gatherings except for a cere-

monial toast to the Lord. We defer to one another because some of us don't drink and some of us struggle with addictions.

School uniforms are another example. We'd be hard pressed to find one parent who doesn't disagree with some element of our school dress code, but nobody wants to do away with it.

We give up some measure of choice for the common good. At 8:17 on a Tuesday morning when a belt or a tie has gone missing, we may struggle with the whole concept, but all of us save time and money because we're willing to defer to our uniform policy.

Holy people throughout the ages speak of the tremendous growth in holiness that comes by doing something someone else's way. You're asked to make lasagna for the Lord's Day Meal. Someone hands you the recipe. You know you make the best lasagna, but you defer and do it another way.

A great practical exercise would be to make a conscious decision in the next week to do something someone else's way. Go to a Chinese restaurant when you'd rather stop by Veracruz. Load the dishwasher a different way. Pay the bills the way your spouse would like.

Deference, of course, is not blind obedience. This is not a call to disengage our consciences, our judgment, or our brains. We're not drinking the kool-aid. For the sake of our common life, we choose to defer.

## Solution #2 - Love

Suppose a guest shows up at our prayer meeting wearing a halter top and a short skirt. What do we say?

*Thank you for coming. We are so glad you're here.*

We live in a world hungry for the love of God, thirsty for living water. Christ sent his disciples to the ends of the earth and when we get there, we can't lift an eyebrow in disdain and say, like the Pharisee in Luke 18, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like that teenage girl in the

# Love and Respect the Sensibilities of Others

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*skimpy dress.*"

In the time I've spent in Jenkins, Charlotte, and the Bronx, I've seen some interesting sights. When we took the Jenkins kids to the pool, maybe one in four children had a bathing suit. There was a boy in Jenkins who was about ten. He owned one pair of pants that were probably a size sixteen. The cuffs were rolled up five or six times. When he ran, he would hold up his pants by the belt loop. He didn't own a belt. I dropped him off at home one day. He lived in squalor with around fifteen family members in a dilapidated trailer. His grandfather had just been arrested for molesting his little sister. Clothes were the least of his problems.

We had two little girls. Prinnie and Evelyn, I think. They would take turns wearing sneakers or patent leather dress shoes to camp. No socks. They had about three outfits between them — a few play clothes and a church dress. They didn't have underwear.

(Of course, now that I'm a mother, I understand that these things happen. We were sitting at a wedding waiting for the bride to process in and a nameless someone who may or may not be related to me leaned over and said — rather loudly — *I'm not wearing underwear*. And do you know who was sitting behind me? Joe Almeter. I just know those Almeter kids never pulled shenanigans like this).

Some children don't have decent clothing.

When we answer the great commission and go to the ends of the earth to share the love of Christ, the people we meet won't look like us, talk like us, or dress like us. What will our response be?

## Solution # 3 - Respect

Years ago I was at the Y for the last day of swimming lessons. Parents were gathered outside the pool area to watch their kids. One child came with a young, attractive nanny. She plopped herself down on the floor in front of all the parents in a pair of low-rise jeans that exposed half her backside as well as a tattoo in a strategic location. Before I knew what was happening, a nameless little boy who may or may not

have been related to me toddled over to her and poked her tattoo.

I was speechless. The woman, God bless her, was gracious. I later reported the whole event to a friend of mine who said, "Serves her right. He was just doing what every other male wanted to do!"

Some women say, "If you don't like it, don't look." A key part of being an alternate society is teaching our boys to avert their eyes, but, my gosh, when it's all hanging out there, there's nowhere to avert.

We should respect the sensibilities of others.

Princeton University recently studied how the male brain responds to scantily clad women. Their research found that when confronted with a lot of skin, the area of the brain associated with objects (hammers, saws) lit up. Analysts concluded that test subjects viewed women as objects rather than people or, to quote the study, "as something to be used rather than someone to connect with."

The study continues: Some of the men showed zero brain activity in the medial prefrontal cortex, which is that part of the brain that lights up when a person ponders another person's thoughts, intentions, and feelings.

Researchers called this particular finding "shocking" because they almost never see this specific section of the brain shut down in this way. This means that these men see women "as sexually inviting, but they are not thinking about their minds," said Susan Fiske a psychologist at Princeton University. "The lack of activation in this social cognition area is really odd, because it hardly ever happens."

We have to respect our differences.

## Solution # 4- Suppleness

I hesitate to share a personal example for fear that everyone's going to take it as law. But here goes. I was swimming one afternoon. A brother was talking to me, and I had to climb out the pool, up a ladder, in front of this man.

I wasn't wearing something outrageous, just a regular tank suit. But I was suddenly and profoundly aware that I was

mostly undressed. It was a moment of revelation for me. And I bought suits with skirts after that. They solved some problems, but not all problems. And I want to reiterate that I am not making any pronouncement about tank suits. My point is that I felt a nudge to change the way I did things.

What is the Lord nudging you to do?

We have to be supple. We have to be willing to bend. We all got a great lesson in what it means to be supple when the ice storm hit last February. The supple trees survived; the brittle ones shattered and left a lot of damage in their wake. We should strive to be supple before God — to be bendable, moldable, and adjustable. That doesn't mean wishy-washy or fake, but at some level willing to hear the Lord and respond.

Our Rule of Life is intentionally vague. Read it. It's long on ideals and short on specifics. The term bathing suit is never mentioned.

We are not going to manage this issue by directive. We can't legislate appropriate dress. We can make agreements about specific events — the Spring Dance, PE uniforms, the prayer meeting, but we are not going to solve the issue of dress by posting commandments eleven through thirty-two on stone tablets in front of the O'Brien Center.

We are going to move forward by every Alleluia member examining his or her heart and saying, "What, Lord, would you have me do?"

We have to be supple.

## Solution # 5 - Healing

We all have hot buttons.

I have a friend. If you say "Lord's Day Meal", she recoils ever so slightly. I have another friend. When we have times of reconciliation at a retreat, she suddenly has to go to the bathroom and stay there.

We all have issues, but we have to ask ourselves how many "sensitive issues" we have. If we have a knee-jerk reaction to every teaching, every Dove article, we have to evaluate why that is. Every Christian is called to holiness. We live out this call in a communal context. In our covenant we state,

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# Suppleness

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"This is the way God has chosen for our sanctification. We willingly ask him to use it." We say we're open to forming others and being formed ourselves.

If every topic becomes, "They're not telling me how to raise my kids, spend my money, use my time, dress, etc.", we have to ask a hard, hard question: *Why are we here?*

I was taking John to the doctor a few years back. I said, "John, let's get in the car. We're going to the doctor." And did he pitch a fit! Screaming, flailing, kicking things.

My normal M.O. would be to say, "Get in that car right now," but, praise be to God, I sat him down and asked him what was wrong. His big brown eyes filled with tears. "Shots!" he wailed. His last appointment had been his four-year check that included four shots.

When we have a vehement, visceral response to something, we have to stop and examine ourselves to determine what exactly is at the root of that reaction.

If we hear the word modesty and cringe, why is that?

Dress is a complicated issue and so many, many elements inform the way we view it: what we were allowed to wear growing up. What we weren't allowed to wear. How men have responded to us. How women have responded to us. Fear of growing old. Fear of waking up one morning and realizing we dress just like our mothers.

Unkind words. Unwanted attention. No attention at all.

This article includes prayers for healing and forgiveness that we can take to our prayer times to invite God to speak to our hearts about the issue of dress.

Years ago I sat next to a brother at a basketball game. He looked out on the court and said, "We have the prettiest girls anywhere."

It was true -- they were young, fresh-faced, beautiful.

We're called to be an alternate society, but too often we're not an alternate society. We're merely mimicking and modifying the

## Binding Up Our Wounds – Prayers for Healing and Forgiveness

<p>For the times we've judged other women or girls, please forgive us, Lord.</p> <p>For the times we've gossiped about other women or families, please forgive us, Lord.</p> <p>For the times we've spoken rashly or unkindly to others about dress, please forgive us, Lord.</p> <p>For the times we've harbored resentment against Alleluia leaders, please forgive us, Lord.</p> <p>For the times we've intentionally ignored an agreement, please forgive us, Lord.</p> <p>For the times we've ignored promptings of the Holy Spirit in this area, please forgive us, Lord.</p> <p>For the times we have caved in to our children in an area of conviction, please forgive us, Lord.</p>	<p>For the times we've intentionally dressed provocatively, please forgive us, Lord.</p> <p>We have wounds because we've encountered legalism in the area of dress. Please heal us, Lord.</p> <p>We have wounds because we grew up with no boundaries at all. Please heal us, Lord.</p> <p>We have wounds because of the way men and boys have treated us. Please heal us, Lord.</p> <p>We have wounds from the way other women and girls have treated us. Please heal us, Lord.</p> <p>We have wounds because we grew up poor. Please heal us, Lord.</p> <p>We have wounds related to our figures and body types. Please heal us, Lord.</p> <p>We have wounds because of unwanted sexual attention or abuse. Please heal us, Lord.</p>
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culture at large. What if we took that basketball team of beautiful young women and showed the world what true beauty is? We could turn the world of fashion on its head. We could be a true light to a world that can no longer distinguish between glitter and gold, a world that's drowning in its own excess.

It begins with having a heart that is inclined to love others, a heart inclined to be supple before God, a heart healed and whole.

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