

# “Sunday-best apparel” is not what it used to be

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**By Erica Harms and Sammie Jo Barstow**

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP)—Depending on where a person worships, wearing one’s “Sunday best” to church today might not mean what it once did.

On Sunday mornings, more and more people are passing on dresses or ties and opting for blue jeans or khakis instead.

A dilemma now exists between the argument that casual clothing makes visitors feel welcome and the desire to dress in finer clothes out of respect for God’s house.

Harold Fanning, pastor of Shoal Creek Baptist Church in Decatur, Ala., said his church is more “business casual” than anything else.

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"Personally, I wear a suit on Sunday mornings, but I usually dress casual on Sunday evening—more of a sport jacket, slacks and no tie," he said.

But for Cecil Taylor, dean of the [School of Christian studies at the University of Mobile](#), going casual means a slightly different look. Taylor wears jeans to church and said he doesn't mean any disrespect to God by doing so.

After all, Taylor recalled, David was anointed king of Israel after working in the fields.

In the biblical story, David's divine appointment is preceded by God telling Samuel of other candidates, "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

"The important thing is to come before the Lord," Taylor said. "I think whether I wear jeans or a three-piece suit is immaterial before the Lord."

The definition of "casual" and how it's worn is immaterial—the real battle is against the suggestive clothing creeping into the churches, said Theresa

Shadrix, a member of the [Association of Image Consultants International](#).

“There is so much of the world in church today that we no longer stand out as a group of people by the way that we dress,” Shadrix said.

Shadrix, who also is co-director of the Miss Jacksonville State University pageant, has helped women of all ages find their style and motivate them to dress in a way both enjoyable and true to their religious convictions.

The moment Shadrix gave her life to Christ at the age of 19, she said, not only did her heart change, but so did the clothes her closet flaunted.

“I was not raised in a Christian home, so when I dedicated my life to Christ and married my Christian husband, I had to clean out my closet—literally,” she said.

That was an issue that also concerned several women at First Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, Ala. Bare midriffs, too-short skirts and strapless dresses were becoming common Sunday attire, they said. The women wondered if fashion and modesty could be combined.

To that end, they hosted a fashion show involving more than 70 models ranging in age from 18 months to 70-plus years. Ten vendors furnished everything from casual clothes to dressy suits and eveningwear.

“We wanted to show women, young and old, that we can be feminine, stylish and fashionable while still remaining modest in our dress,” Robin Ford, who coordinated the event, said.

“Although I don’t have a daughter, I do have a son, and I am concerned about the young women who will turn his head one day,” said Ford, who became concerned about inappropriate dress about three years ago.

“I realized that modesty needs to be emphasized. And I believe the perfect organization to teach modesty to women is the one God created—the

church.”

Between segments of the fashion show, Barbara Gladney provided a Bible study emphasizing biblical guidelines on dress and encouraging women to value themselves and the image they portray as Christians.

For teens, that image is difficult because they get mixed signals about fashion from society and the church, said Shadrix, the image consultant.

Pastor Fanning said as long as his church’s teenagers aren’t wearing sexually inappropriate clothing, he is thankful to have them in church, however they are dressed.

Students with body piercings may challenge the norm for church appearance.

“But I’d rather have a kid looking like ... he fell headfirst into a tackle box than out somewhere other than church,” he said.

*With reporting by the [Alabama Baptist](#) and [Religion News Service](#).*

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