

*The Great Debate:
Casual or Formal*

What the heck do I wear?

SCENARIO

The tension is rising.

Another round of the debate is about to begin.

On one side is the older generation, whose attire includes dresses, heels, and long, formal overcoats. On the other side is the younger generation, adorned in their jeans, stretch t-shirts, tussled hair, and many piercings. You sense each side sizing up the other. You see the rolled eyes and shaking heads, you hear the “tst, tst, tst” from one side and the snickers from the other. You can tell the debate is just about to get out of hand when....ahhhh, the referee has arrived. The tension immediately begins to dissipate.

Whew, we thought there was going to be some harsh words and judgments, but the presence of the referee has immediately calmed everyone down. Wow! Amazing! Everyone now has smiles on their faces and can't wait to greet the referee. How does the ref do it? Who is this amazing person that has the uncanny ability to calm the storm? Well, most just call her “the pastor's wife”.

OUR EXPERIENCE

This is an area in which I always wanted to be sensitive; one in which my thinking evolved. I grew up attending an ultra-conservative church where it was common, almost expected, that everyone wore formal clothes to service. For women and girls, that meant dresses or long skirts complemented with blouses or sweaters. It was taught that you wore your very best to church because you were coming to the Lord's house.

Throughout our years in the pastorate, my view on this subject changed. There was a time when it used to be so important for me to wave the banner of "wearing your best for the Lord" that it almost became vain. Sadly enough, it wasn't only a priority for me, it seemed to be that way for others as well.

Growing up, I had a friend that wore jeans to Sunday evening services from time to time. Can you believe it? As you can imagine, that friend definitely received many looks from other attenders.

Reflecting back, it made me sad how divisive and judgmental the issue became. I decided to really think and pray about it because it was such an important issue to me. During that time, the Lord gave me a good lickin'.

Who was I to even care what people wore to church? Did Jesus ever make the blind beggar on the road feel out of place because he didn't have the right attire on? Did He ever shake His head and snub his nose at any of His followers because they didn't have the right clothes? As I read through the Bible, I didn't come across one instance of that occurring. On the contrary, he healed the blind beggar and cared for those that were dressed with a devoted heart to follow His teachings and His ways. In fact, He chastised those that relied heavily on outward appearances.

So, all that to say, I changed my mindset toward what I wore to church. I was still very intentional in picking out my clothes, but not for the purpose I had before. My wardrobe changed dramatically over the years to be more community-sensitive.

In both churches where we pastored, I took a visual survey of the culture in which we were living. What type of community was it – rural, suburban, urban? My goal was to blend in so that my style of dress was average and common. Why? Because I wanted to be sure that every person that walked through the doors of the church felt comfortable and welcome. I did not want to seem too dressy to the one that came wearing jeans and a t-shirt. On the other hand, I didn't want to be too casual to those that preferred to wear dresses or skirts.

Our first pastorate was located in a rural community. A typical wardrobe was filled with denim, as well as cotton/polyester blends (i.e. lightweight skirts, sundresses, sweaters). I don't think I owned a pair of high-heels during that time. Comfortable, casual, dress shoes were more the style. Light, pastel colors were good to wear. No one seemed to wear bright colors.

Our second pastorate was located in a bedroom community. In order to dress like an average attender, my wardrobe consisted of rayon/polyester pants and skirts. My main color became black (both because it's a good base to work from and because it's a good color for me). I changed from light pastel colors to deeper neutral tones. I wore less denim. My Sunday attire alternated from pants to skirts, but I tried to stay in the semi-casual look.

JUST REMEMBER...

Whether we like it or not, our culture is one that, many times, judges on appearance. As pastors' wives, it is our responsibility, our duty, to make every person feel accepted and welcomed into the church. We would never want anyone to feel that they are wearing something "less" or don't belong because of their clothing.

Oh how our churches need to be a place of warmth, acceptance, and love. May you, as God gives you wisdom, be the example of showing that acceptance – even by the way you dress.