

# PAST STILL PRESENT

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## HISTORY OF THE HABIT...ILLUSTRATED WITH OUR SUPERIORS GENERAL



Mother Theresa Weber 1845-1848

The **habit worn at Steinerberg**, designed by Rev. Karl Rolfus, was a one-piece robe of loosely-woven coarse black material held in place at the waistline with a cincture. The sleeves were set in and a pelerine or short cape was worn over the shoulders. The wimple was white, smooth in front with a bonnet attached to the back. The frontlet was black and it, together with the black veil which was attached to the front, completed the head covering. The veil had a wide turn back which could be lowered over the forehead when the Sister was in public. [See the picture at the right →] The tips of the veil were crossed and tacked together in the back,

As a symbol of the Sisters' association with the Precious Blood devotion they wore a red cross with seven drops of blood on the left side of the pelerine. This habit was worn by the Sisters until 1860.



Mother Celestine Maier 1848-1860

In **1860** the Ottmarsheim-Gurtweil separation took place. The General Chapter which effected this change adopted the **habit worn by the Precious Blood Sisters in Rome**. It consisted of a black garb, white "sunflower" headdress with a small flat frontlet of black material, black veil, a pelerine with seven buttons down the front, a small white collar with three small white buttons down the front, a red cincture around the waist, and a gold heart suspended from the neck. Each item symbolized some aspect of devotion to the Precious Blood. Thus, the garb was the symbol of penance; the headdress symbolized the crown of thorns; the three small buttons on the collar reminded the Sisters of the three nails; the seven buttons down the pelerine represented the seven sheddings of the Precious Blood; the red cincture was a reminder of the scourging of our Lord and of the rope which tied him to the pillar.



Mother Augusta Volk 1865-1884

There is no picture of **Mother Casparine Maise 1860-1865**, but she would have worn this habit.

The round fluted **sunflower bonnet was changed in 1897** because it was a time-consuming task to launder it and because it was injurious to health. It took an expert ironer three-quarters of an hour to flute the frill with small metal sticks heated on tiny oil stoves. Inhalation of the oil was not pleasant.



Mother Armella Beutler 1884-1902



Mother Beata Neukum 1902-1920

The bonnet introduced in 1897 was straight across the top and was bent at a ninety-degree angle along the side of the face. A frill which was fluted with a fluting iron was fastened around the bonnet. The narrow squared-off frontlet was white. The collar was white but the buttons were removed and the style of the collar was changed.

The narrow frontlet was widened some time during Mother Wilhelmine's administration [1920-1938]. This is how it happened: Mother Wilhelmine fell and sustained an injury to her forehead. A special, white frontlet was designed to conceal the injury. The wider frontlet looked much nicer and so it was introduced generally.



Mother Wilhelmine Vogelpohl 1920-1938

On July 1, 1930 the red cincture was changed to black because the red material was no longer available.



On August 10, 1935 the gold heart

was changed to the large silver cross

and a gold ring was introduced.



Later, this cross was made available in three sizes: large, medium, small. Because the cross did not hang well amid the seven buttons on the pelerine, the scapular was introduced in 1936. During the summer of 1936 the frill disappeared and now the bonnet resembled a shoe box. The tight bonnet caused problems in receiving Holy Communion and in eating. On October 10, 1957 the bottom ends of the bonnet were cut off and replaced with an elastic band which hooked on both ends of the bonnet, thus giving a little more jaw room.



Mother Ancilla Moellmann 1938-1944

The hem of the habit and the sleeve turnover were both seven inches wide to represent the seven sheddings of the Precious Blood. A mantle and an over-veil were worn in public. The mantle was discarded in 1937. The over-veil was discontinued during the summer in 1950 and soon thereafter, entirely.

August 2, 1938 After final approbation as a Papal Community the habit was established by the *Constitutions* Chapter 4, Article 26 – The dress of the novices, like that of the professed, should consist of the habit with a scapular of black material, a black woolen cincture, a white collar, a white headdress and over this a white veil. At the first profession, they exchange the white veil for a black one and

receive a silver cross suspended from a red cord; at the perpetual profession, the sisters receive a gold ring.



Mother Borgia Springrose 1944-1956



Mother Lorenza Holtman 1956-1968

A major change was made **August 9, 1959** when the habit was shortened to five inches from the floor. (It gradually increased in inches from the floor). **The peaked headdress was introduced.** It was meant to be a time-saver as far as the laundry was concerned; it was also intended to free the eyes so that the Sisters could begin driving cars. At first it was not permitted to use starch on the band but gradually it was used again because it improved the appearance. However, if a sister’s face was somewhat elongated, the peak on top of her head didn’t help her looks, and, if her ears were not located in the right place, they could become very sore.



Mother Lorenza Holtman 1956-1968

Looking back, it seems the main reasons for changing the habit were concerns about health, expense, safety and comfort. The second Vatican Council urged religious to update their religious garb.

On **September 27, 1965** Mother Lorenza wrote: “Sisters, in regard to a proposed habit change, I would like to say that it would not be done immediately. If the majority of you wish it, we shall pilot the project for a year or so, selecting a couple of Sisters from each group in different types of work to wear it and try it out. We would not do away with the veil. We feel this must be kept in some way. We would also wish that anyone who does not care to change to anything new could keep our present habit. That could go well for the Sisters who are not engaged in the active apostolate.”

**December 26, 1966** “Sisters, some weeks ago we asked those who were interested in making a habit to be piloted to come to model it. We decided it would be best to permit a time of trial for all types then displayed (with a few exceptions) so that we could get the opinions pro and con. We have had them! Yes, I’ve been deluged with mail and personal comments from clergy, other religious and interested laity. You know what our Sisters’ comments are. It is too early and too abrupt to adopt secular dress now, Sisters. Neither our Sisters nor the laity are ready for this. The change must, as we all realize, be accepted by our Sisters and the laity we serve. Hence at our last Council meeting we drew up some directions covering all pilot habits. You will have time over the holidays to make necessary adjustments to what you now have.

“All Sisters are to wear veils. We feel that colors of the habits are to be limited to black and white only. Our present salaries do not allow permanents, visits to hair stylists, etc. Hence, no Precious Blood Sister may go to a beauty parlor or to a friend or relative to have her hair styled....Some may have relatives and friends who help, but our policy has always been to steer clear of the ‘Haves and the Have-nots’: so that is out hereafter. Once habits are piloted and selections have been finally made we will have time to consider...”



Sister Verona Schafer 1968-1974

**Since the 1968 Chapter the habit and headdress were modernized,** allowing the Sisters to make the changes when convenient and acceptable to them. **The modern habit consisted basically of a suit, or skirt and blouse, and a greater choice of colors was permitted. The ring and cross have been retained. The veil is not worn by all.**

On **August 14, 1971**, Sr. Verona, Superior General, wrote to each Sister: “After many painful hours of trying to find what is best for us to do at the present time and considering the many divergent viewpoints and strong feelings regarding the matter of the habit, the delegates finally arrived at the following decision:

**“The Chapter affirms the principle of a religious type of dress, that is, that religious dress is a valuable sign and one that we uphold as a community. A religious type of dress, traditional or modified (black and white with the veil), is retained. The Chapter further affirms that a contemporary uniform type of religious dress be allowed for those who wish it. Within this principle, in certain situations contemporary dress may be worn. A sister may wear a religious type of dress at all times; or a sister may wear a religious type of dress for apostolic activities and lay it aside for casual wear; or, on the other hand, she may find it advisable to wear contemporary dress with or without the veil.”**

On **June 3, 1979** Sr. Miriam Joseph, Superior General, wrote to the Sisters:

“The members of the Religious Dress Committee appointed by the Council Team and announced to the Community on October 1, 1978 have worked very consistently and very professionally since that time. They have done much research and have met several times with the Council Team. After much study, **a decision has been made by the Council Team that our religious dress will be a suit with options—a jacket with either vest (long or short) and a skirt, or jumper.”**



Sister Miriam Joseph Tochtrop  
1974-1980

*Constitutions 1985* 7.1 “As religious women we give public witness to Christ and to his values. The religious dress worn by our congregation consists of simple attire as described in our Directory. It is appropriate to the expression of our consecration in the cultural and geographic setting of our ministry. **Our profession cross**, received at first profession, and our **ring**, received at final profession, together with our dress, appearance, and bearing, make us known to the world as those who are consecrated in the name of Jesus.” Directory states: “Our religious dress consists of **simple apparel** such as dress, suit, skirt and blouse.”

And this brings us to the present day.



Sister Andrée Fries  
1980-1986, 1992-1998



Sister Joan Klaas 1986-1992



Sister Susan Borgel 1998-2004



Sister Mary Whited 2004-2010



Sister Fran Raia 2012-