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Summary on the use of stoles – Tim Attwell

The stole is a symbol of authority and servant leadership, originally worn by magistrates in the days of the ancient Roman Empire, then taken over by the Christian Church to signify who was in pastoral charge of a local congregation or diocese when Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official state religion (4th Century CE).

Therefore you are able to see who has pastoral charge of Societies (Churches), Circuits, Districts or Connexions – or Parishes, Dioceses etc for that matter – by looking for the ones who are wearing stoles. For that reason Supernumeraries like me, who no longer have a pastoral charge, may not wear stoles any more. Probationers who do have pastoral charges may wear stoles.

Deacons may wear a stole over the right shoulder and fastened at the left hip when they are fulfilling a ministry of Service in the context of a worship service. Only if a Local Preacher, Evangelist, Bible Woman or Lay Pastor has pastoral charge of a society or preaching place as a lay agent, she/he may wear a stole in the manner of a deacon, since they are regarded by our Church as members of the broader diaconate and have been appointed to have pastoral charge over a Society or Preaching place.

The same applies to General Presidents of our various Manyanos, District Lay Leaders and Lay Presidents – they are part of the broader diaconate, have authority and exercise servant leadership. However, they too should wear the stole in the manner of a deacon. To sum up: wearing a stole over both shoulders and hanging loose in front, or held in place under a belt or girdle, signifies someone who has pastoral charge and exercises the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Wearing the stole over the right shoulder and fastened at the left hip signifies someone who has pastoral charge and authority and exercises a ministry of Word and Service. Choir members should not wear stoles – that would be seriously confusing. However, if the choir members are gowned, the gowns may be decorated by some sort of bright bands running down the front of the gown, but clearly fastened to the gown as part of the decoration of the gown and not confused with the stole, which is a separate vestment from the gown or cassock altogether and fulfills a different function.