



## NJPN Comment

# Giving up my clothes for Lent

**Fr Rob Esdaile**



I was attracted by an email I received some weeks ago inviting me to take up the 'Six Items Challenge'. It came from campaign group 'Labour Behind the Label', which works to protect workers' rights in the global garments industry. They invited me to limit my wardrobe to just six items of outer clothing for six weeks, beginning on Ash Wednesday. How about that for a Lenten exercise?

It caused me a gentle smile. Would anyone notice a statute of limitations applied to my clerical wardrobe? However, I have duly limited my attire for the duration. Two jumpers (charcoal and brown), navy chinos, grey trousers and two shirts (grey and light blue) comprise my 'Spring Collection'. One of the shirts gets left to soak each night before an early morning rinse.

It stands to make some useful sponsorship (*see everyday* [hero.co.uk/event/six-items-challenge-2019](http://hero.co.uk/event/six-items-challenge-2019)) for a good cause. Labour Behind The Label was, for instance, instrumental in getting compensation for workers and adoption of the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety after the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster, when a factory complex collapsed, killing 1,136 garment workers.

Perhaps more importantly, I hope it will be a talking point in the parish and beyond (even if the conversation is along the lines of: 'Fr Rob has lost the plot again!'). It does at least raise the question: What's the point of putting oneself to that inconvenience? It's not exactly world-shaking, is it, for me to drop out of the 'fast fashion' sector that I had never entered? (Like many men, I wear clothes until told that they are worn out ... but unlike many men, there's no 'significant other' to pass judgement on my outfits.)

Above all, I'm experiencing it as an exercise in raising awareness. I choose to be conscious of the hands that stitched my clothes, perhaps for only a few pence, in poor conditions, with neither union representation nor the right to toilet breaks. I already try to shop ethically, but this 'fast' is changing me. And I hope that that awareness might be contagious.

Thank you to whichever sister or brother (probably a sister) cut the cloth, sewed the seams, stitched the buttons, added the label, packed the garment. I am grateful – and I affirm your right to a decent wage, decent conditions and a decent life for your kids.

**Fr. Rob Esdaile is Parish Priest of Our Lady of Lourdes, Thames Ditton.**

**See Labour Behind The Label at [www.labourbehindthelabel.org](http://www.labourbehindthelabel.org)**

**[www.thecatholicuniverse.com](http://www.thecatholicuniverse.com)**