

INSPIRED TO
Sew

*A glimpse into the creative heart of today's
most talented sewing & quilting artists.*



Ecclesiastical Sewing



What a team! Curiosity lead Mary Mulari to discover Ecclesiastical Sewing. Rita Farro, our SITS word master, wrote the interview. Both are wearing Mary's famous Crisscross Apron Pattern.

Thank you Mary Mulari for introducing me to Ecclesiastical Sewing. As you will read, Mary was traveling and stumbled upon a curious sewing shop. Not a sewing machine dealer. Not a fabric shop, nor an alterations or bridal service. Ecclesiastical is a word I find difficult to pronounce, but Wowza! Mary discovered a delightful sewing business.

Ecclesiastical Sewing is a niche market. Although Carrie Roberts started to sew as a hobby, she was destined to create and contribute to a higher calling. Her work is amazing! Even kids are fascinated by the regal and glorious ceremonial vestments as shown in the pic on page 11. Enjoy this special sewing world! Sew SCHMETZ & Grabbit® Too!

Rhonda

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Cover: Bespoke Chasuble with
Chalice Design

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<https://ritassewfun.blogspot.com/>

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Ecclesiastical
Sewing

Carrie Roberts



Ecclesiastical Sewing

Mary Mulari's husband, Doug, is Mayor of Aurora, Minnesota. In February, 2019 Mary went with him to a Regional Minnesota Mayors meeting *Up North*, in a small town called Baxter.

While Doug was attending seminars, Mary was free to explore the town. Much to her surprise, she stumbled into a very unique sewing business. It wasn't a charming quilt shop ... or a sewing machine dealer. The sign said, *Ecclesiastical Sewing*. Hummm...

Mary's has a pretty amazing career in the sewing industry, AND she's a lifelong Lutheran. But she never thought about a mash-up between sewing and religion becoming a viable business.

So, whose idea was this?

The heroine of this sewing story is Carrie Roberts.

Like many of us, Carrie learned how to sew when she was a child. By the time she entered college, she was working part time at a fabric store. She loved making display garments, and she became an accomplished seamstress. In 1982, she was accepted into the costume design program at the University of Minnesota. The classes in costume, fashion history, design, tailoring, draping, and flat pattern design took her skills to a whole new level.

Her first attempt at sewing religious vestments came during those college years. She was attending a church on campus, and the pastor asked if she could create a stole for him.



University Lutheran Chapel Minneapolis Dedication Vestments.

Remembering that first effort, Carrie says, *I said yes, but I had no idea what that might entail. There were no stole patterns. So I created a pattern from one of his other stoles. I didn't know what was used on the inside, so I selected a lambswool interfacing. There were no embroidery machines, no designs, and not much to work with. I saw an image of a lamb in an old vestment catalog, so I traced that lamb and using a combination of hand embroidery and machine satin stitching, created an emblem. The stole turned out okay, but I didn't really know how it should be. My pastor wore that stole for years. Later that summer, I also created a chasuble for him. There were no clear patterns, no instructions, and finding fabrics in the correct colors was impossible. This was 35 years ago, there was no internet, no access to worldwide shopping, vintage books, designs, or patterns. I knew nothing of shoulder slant or how the shape should be.*

Troubled and frustrated by the lack of available information, Carrie set aside her interest in religious sewing and began to focus on bridal. After college, Carrie launched a custom bridal business. She created all manner of bridal attire, often drafting her own patterns. As a newlywed, she moved into making window treatments, draperies, and home decorating.

Her sewing skills morphed with Carrie as she moved through the different stages of her life. She and Clint had three children, and they decided to do home schooling. Of course, she sewed her kids' clothes. When she purchased her first embroidery machine, she loved it! She used embroidery to make her children's wear look unique, beautiful and custom made. At first she sewed (and embroidered) all kinds of things for her



A special collection of stoles.

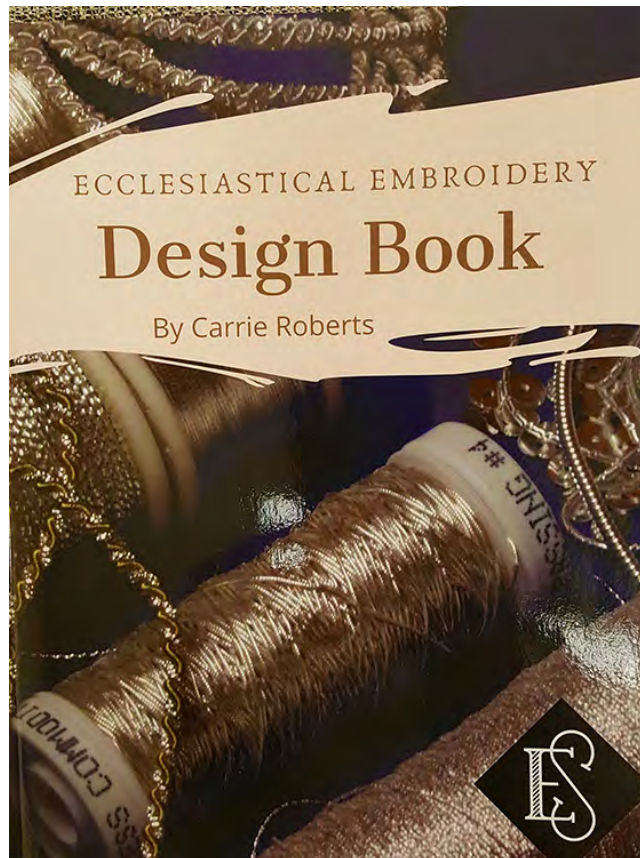
own children. Fancy dresses, coats, PJ's. Her new skills and her entrepreneurial spirit inspired her to create a line of clothing for a high end children's wear store in the Twin Cities.

Life took another turn in 2006 when Clint had the opportunity to start his own dental practice in Northern Minnesota. The church they joined was building a new sanctuary and had received a vestment catalog. The pastor said, *It would be fun to have a special stole to pull out just one time a year to mark special celebrations such as Christmas or Easter.*

Christmas was only two or three weeks away, but as Carrie flipped through that catalog, a small fire was kindled. She wanted to create a set to gift her pastor in time for Christmas. She began work immediately. Thoughts can become things!

Carrie remembers, *On Christmas Eve, my husband and I arrived at Church early. Pastor was in his office. I handed him a box wrapped in Christmas paper. He wasn't expecting anything, so he was surprised. When he opened the box, he was speechless. The box contained a stole, altar scarf, and pulpit fall with Christmas designs. There was still time before the service to change out the altar hangings. Everyone enjoyed a special set of altar hangings that year.*

Carrie created two more sets for their church. But once the sets were hung, she felt something was wrong. The techniques she used for Home Dec weren't right for this project and she felt the colors and fabrics were off. That was the beginning of her obsession with ecclesiastical sewing. She started searching the



Recently released **Ecclesiastical Embroidery Design Book** contains vintage and original embroidery designs.

internet and she accumulated a vast library on the subjects of Church Vestments, Church Embroidery, Vestment Making, Liturgical Arts, Symbols, and all related topics.

Through trial and error, Carrie learned what worked and what didn't, and she created some beautiful altar sets for her home church that were right in every way.

If it was such a struggle for Carrie to find the information she needed to make church vestments, she figured other people had the same frustration. What if she gathered all this information and resources, and put it on a website? Maybe Ecclesiastical Sewing could actually be a business.

A student at heart, she wanted to learn all she could. She packed a suitcase, took courses in making church linens, even studying with the Royal School of Needlework in Williamsburg, VA (<https://royal-needlework.org.uk/courses/certificate-diploma/williamsburg-intensives/>).

Carrie started a blog about Ecclesiastical Sewing. There was a lot of interest in this subject. In 2016, she was ready to launch her website. She was working full time in her husband's dental office, but she spent her evenings and weekends in a tiny room in her basement, working on Ecclesiastical Sewing. Her family was casually supportive, although, clearly they didn't expect Mom's little hobby business to amount to much.



A new design that just passed test stitching.

But amazing things started happening almost immediately. People were eager for information. They wanted to buy patterns and fabric to create their own vestments. They also expressed a desire for finished altar hangings.

Carrie had a relationship with a company in the United Kingdom that has been weaving fabrics since the 1800's. Some of their patterns have been a part of their line for over 100 years. The weaver asked about several of Carrie's embroidery designs, and they discussed developing woven fabric design. But the project never quite came together. Several months later, Carrie asked the artist, Edward Riojas, if he would be interested in creating artwork that could be turned into designs for church vestments.

They worked together to create a brocade fabric with a unique and beautiful weave. The big question was whether the Lutheran Church would understand or be open to using such a special fabric. The price point would be much higher than they were accustomed. Other church bodies were using these fabrics but this would be new territory.

By January 2017, the first order of Red Luther Rose brocade was delivered to ES. There was sticker shock in the marketplace, but an awakening was beginning. ES created a collection of embroidery designs for pastor or priest stoles, deacon stoles, chasubles, chalice veils, burses, and altar hangings such as superfrontals, pulpit falls, and lectern falls.



Ecclesiastical sewing room.

At first, a local shop stitched out the ES embroidery designs, but Carrie knew they needed to do their own embroidery work. Carrie's daughter, Ashley, and son-in-law Travis, joined ES, and they started with a single needle embroidery machine. Soon, the small basement room wasn't large enough. Their next move was to purchase a 15-needle embroidery machine, taking over the entire basement of Ashley's home.

Carrie's son, Chris, also came into the business. He manages the website, SEO, and social media. Ashley's husband, Travis, is the expert when it comes to operating the industrial embroidery machines. After two years, they outgrew Ashley's basement. Chris began to look for a space that could accommodate the growing Ecclesiastical Sewing business.

They looked at several spaces, but nothing was quite right. When Chris found the old fish market, the place was a wreck. Carrie said, *I could see our work tables and spaces for fabric. I imagined new work stations. That old fish market called to us. Within a few weeks, we had a lease, the work crew came in, and the space was transformed. It is a bright sunny open space with lots of tables. It's a happy place and we love creating beautiful things in the ES Studio. Work is never work at the studio. Everyone feels the joy of the place, including my two little grand-daughters who have their own play corner.*



Our family at the baptism of our first granddaughter.

After expanding into the new studio space, ES was able to add a new embroidery machine, with 18 needles and a larger sewing field. It stitches twice as fast as the 15-needle machine. When embroidery designs have 200,000+ stitches, the additional speed makes a difference.

ES employs seven seamstresses who work from home. They also work with a professional pattern maker, a technical writer, and illustrator to create their patterns.

There are currently 29 patterns available on the ES website. They are developing 15 additional new patterns, and writing a book, which will be published next year.

Carrie says, *Sewing has always been part of my life. My relationship with sewing has changed throughout the years. There were times when sewing was simply fun, and other times when it provided additional income for a young and growing family so that I could continue to be a stay at home mom. There were times when I wasn't able to touch or sew anything for long stretches of time.*

Now, sewing is becoming part of our family because of Ecclesiastical Sewing. Our mission is simple. It is our hope to keep the art of sewing vestments alive and to support those interested in learning how to create vestments, either for their own church, or as a means to earn additional income for themselves or their family."



Even little children are fascinated with ceremonial church vestments.

What started as a small handmade gift has grown into an international business which touches the hearts and lives of people around the world.

<https://www.ecclesiasticalsewing.com>

— written by Rita Farro



Needle Points with Rhonda



When a new staff member asked about the needles used in their machines, Carrie told her that was easy . . .

SCHMETZ. That's all we have in the studio and all that I have used for years. As we sew with a variety of fabrics, we also have to use a variety of needles. We use 12's and 14's for regular sewing. But we also sew a heavy cotton canvas that requires a size 18 needle. We love the new color-coding. Older eyes can no longer easily see the sizes stamped on the side of the needle.



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Ecclesiastical Terms

Burse – A square cloth case used for communion.

Chasuble – A sleeveless outer vestment.

Ecclesiastical – Relating to the Christian church or its clergy.

Liturgical Arts – Sacred arts in service to the church.

Pulpit Fall – A decorative piece, generally a textile, adorning the pulpit.

Stole – A long band traditionally worn around the neck & over the shoulders to the knee or lower.

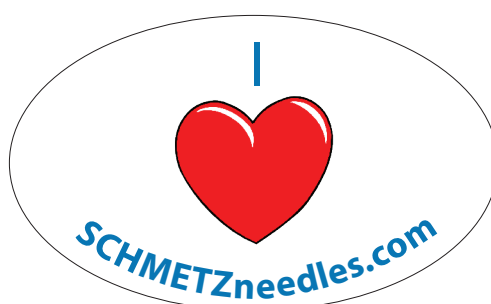
Superfrontals – A cloth placed on top of an altar & hangs down a few inches or more.

Vestment – A chasuble or robe.

Needles don't last forever.

Change the needle!

*Stitch quality improves &
the sewing machine performs
better with a new needle!*



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