



**OFFICE FOR DIVINE WORSHIP
ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA**

CARE OF THE HOLY OILS

The annual celebration of the Chrism Mass provides the opportunity to restate some of the important norms that pertain to the Holy Oils to heighten our corporate reverence toward them. During the Holy Thursday Chrism Mass, the Archbishop consecrates the chrism and blesses the other oils. The distribution of the new oils takes place in the auditorium of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center.

The Holy Oils

The Church requires the use of proper oils for the celebration of the Sacraments. In the case of Confirmation, the use of the proper oil, the Sacred Chrism, involves the validity of the Sacrament. Only oils pressed from olive plants or from other plants that have been recently consecrated or blessed by the Bishop may be used in the administration of the Sacraments (Canon 847§1). Old oil can only be used when there is a true necessity (Canon 847§1). The Holy Oils can never be diluted under any circumstances with additional oil, even in order to fill an oil stock or container or to display the oils in an ambry or a repository. Perfumes or other substances can never be added to the consecrated and blessed oils. Also, the Holy Oils may never be employed for non-sacramental use.

The care of the Holy Oils is the responsibility of the pastor or priest chaplain. The pastor obtains the new oils from his own Bishop and keeps them carefully in a fitting place (Canon 847§2). The Bishop is instructed, in the directions for the celebration of the Chrism Mass, to advise the priests of the manner in which the Holy Oils are to be treated and honored, and carefully

reserved (*The Order of Blessing the Oil of Catechumens and of the Sick and of Consecrating the Chrism*, 28).

Disposing of Old Oils

Each year in anticipation of the Chrism Mass, the pastor should see that all the old oils are collected from the ambry or repository, including all vessels with oil for the sick, and disposed of by burning them (*Book of Blessings*, 1127), or burying them. It is not fitting that the Holy Oils be burned along with trash or other household items. It is a custom in some places to burn all the old oils and the oil-saturated cottons in the new fire of the Easter Vigil.

Vessels for the Holy Oils

Only vessels specifically designated for the Holy Oils—the traditional oil stocks or other containers designed solely for the Holy Oils—are to be used. These vessels should be worthy of their liturgical function and be closed in such a way as to prevent the oils from being spilled and to ensure they remain fresh (*Book of Blessings*, 1126). Each vessel is to be clearly identified for its content. Household bottles, jars and plastic containers are not appropriate for the use of the Holy Oils. The vessels for the Holy Oils are to be thoroughly cleansed with soap and water before they are used for new oils.

Only the amount of new oils typically needed for the year for the administration of the Sacraments will be provided. Holy Oils should not be requested simply for their display. If during the year, additional Holy Oils are needed for sacramental use, please contact the Rector at the Cathedral Rectory.

Reservation of the Holy Oils

The Holy Oils, according to ancient tradition, are reverently reserved in a special place in the church. Typically, this place is in the sanctuary; however, reservation may also be in the baptistry (*Built of Living Stones*, 117). An ambry or repository must be secured and locked (*Book of Blessings*, 1125). The vessels reserved in the ambry or repository must contain only the consecrated and blessed oils. Once again, Holy Oils in these vessels can never be diluted for the sake of display.

The above norms for the care of the Holy Oils were originally approved by Cardinal Justin Rigali on 25 March 2010. Revised on January 10, 2023.