



Archdiocese of Philadelphia  
Office of the Cardinal  
222 North 17<sup>th</sup> Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1299

March 25, 2010

Dear brother Priests,

The Chrism Mass, during which I will consecrate the chrisms and bless the other oils, is a deeply significant occasion for me as your Archbishop to concelebrate with you, my brother priests. This Mass expresses the fullness of the Bishop's priesthood and is a sign of the unity of priests with him in the Eucharistic Mystery and in the sacramental use of the Holy Oils. Through *The Catholic Standard and Times*, I have extended a special invitation to the faithful to join in this Mass as part of our archdiocesan observance of the *Year of the Priest*.

This year the Chrism Mass also provides the opportunity for me 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 new oils will be presented after the Liturgy of the Word and then the Oil of the Sick and the Oil of Catechumens will be blessed followed by the consecration of the Sacred Chrism. The distribution of the new oils will take place as usual in Chapel Hall with a revised plan carried out by several deacons and lay faithful.

### *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 (*Order of Blessing the Oil of Catechumens and of the Sick and of Consecrating 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 or transfer 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.

*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.

I am deeply grateful for your careful observance of these norms. I look forward to our celebration of the Chrism Mass this Holy Thursday, a visible manifestation of the unity of the priesthood in the Sacrifice of Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ ***Justin Card. Rigali***

Cardinal Justin Rigali  
Archbishop of Philadelphia