

PROPER WAY TO DISPOSE OF OLD PASCHAL CANDLES

The Paschal Candle holds a pre-eminent place among all candles used in church, for it is a symbol of Christ and is "the light of Christ, rising in glory," scattering "the darkness of our hearts and minds" (*Sacramentary*, The Easter Vigil, 12). In the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet), the Paschal Candle is called a "pillar of fire" (reminding us of the Israelites flee from Egypt [Ex 14:21]) that mingles with the lights of heaven and "glows to the honor of God." Contrary to the multitude of Easter lilies that appear in churches during this time, "the Easter Candle is *the* Catholic Easter symbol" (*The Lent Triduum, and Easter Answer Book*, Paul J. Niemann).

At the beginning of the Easter Vigil, a new Paschal Candle is lit from the Easter fire and is marked with the signs of Christ, Alpha and Omega - "Christ, yesterday, today, and for ever" - for "all time belongs to him" (*Sacramentary*, The Easter Vigil, 10). The numbers of the current year are also inscribed into this candle, acknowledging that the present time is united to and part of the story of salvation that culminates in Christ.

For this reason, a new Paschal Candle must be used at the Easter Vigil, and this same candle is used throughout the entire year until the next Easter Vigil.

So what should be done with last year's Paschal Candle?

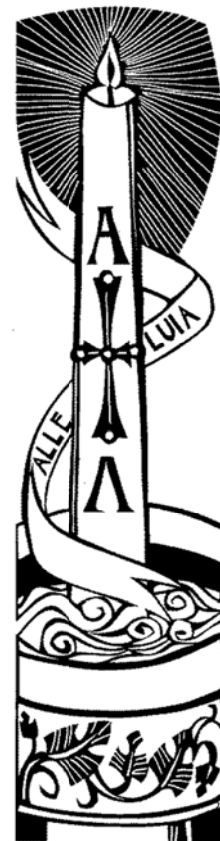
Ideally, each year, the candle should be completely consumed through its normal use in the Church's liturgies: lit at every liturgical celebration during the Easter season until Pentecost Sunday; lit at every Baptism and funeral during the year.

When this is not possible, Paschal candles that no longer correspond to the current liturgical year for which they were blessed can be reverently disposed of by burning them in the Easter Vigil fire. Remove any metals such as pins holding the incense grains, and add it to the fire on Saturday before the fire is blessed. The priest might make a brief comment about the fire and the Paschal Candle to prepare the assembly for the lighting of the new Candle.

Do not burn the Paschal Candle with trash or non-religious refuse.

The wax may also be melted down and made into other candles used for prayer, or the melted down wax may be buried in sacred ground. Break the re-solidified wax into small pieces, place it in a container, and bury it where it will not be stepped on. Another option is to check with the company that made your candle. Sometimes they offer to take your old candles in return for credit on future candles.

When the Paschal Candle no longer looks like a candle—that is, it is melted wax, has been damaged beyond use, or is broken into bits—it no longer holds the blessing and sacred use for which it was first intended. This is true for all sacramentals and sacred objects. (In a similar way, when consecrated wine no longer looks like or serves as wine—having been diluted to the point of being water, no longer having the alcoholic content of wine, or having become vinegar—it is no longer considered appropriate for Communion.) Yet this does not mean that these should be treated with any less care than when they were in their original form. The means of their disposal should communicate reverence for what they had been, and even then, be a reminder of Christ to whom all these things lead us. Thus, burning in the Easter fire seems to be the easiest as well as most reverent way of disposing of old Paschal candles.



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