

Pastoral Guidance - Allergies and Sacred Oils

Pastoral Issue

Recently there has been a trickle of families with children suffering severe allergies expressing concern about the anointings included in the Rites of Baptism and Confirmation.

The issue first presented in 2013. At that time, the Diocesan Liturgy Council (DLC) undertook extensive research and sought wide-ranging advice.

Given recent enquiries, it was considered timely to review our previous research and seek further advice. This has been an extensive process which has confirmed the advice we received in 2013 and provided some additional recommendations which have been incorporated below.

The following Pastoral Guidance is informed by the advice sought and given, and conversation with Bishop Michael Kennedy.

Determining an appropriate pastoral response

When a parish is approached by a family wanting to present their child for baptism or confirmation and they are concerned about the possibility of an allergic reaction to the Sacred Oils, it is recommended that Parish Leaders and Sacramental Teams:

- i) Do everything possible to ensure the child is able to be baptised and confirmed. As a means of assisting with this, each year the DLC will:
 - Set aside a jar of the oil of Chrism and the oil of Catechumens before consecration/blessing so as to provide medical practitioners with a sample for patch testing for allergies;
 - Provide a draft letter which parishes can complete to accompany the sample to be provided to medical practitioners;
 - Advise of any changes to the contents of the Chrism
- ii) Include a version of the following in their sacramental enrolment forms.

Does your child have any allergies that would prevent them from being anointed with the Oil of Chrism or the Oil of Catechumens at baptism/confirmation and/or receiving the host at Communion?
- iii) In dealing with a suspected allergy to the Sacred Oils
 - contact the [Office of Worship and Prayer](#), requesting a non-consecrated sample of the Oil of Chrism and Oil of Catechumens (olive oil only) and as needed the draft letter to medical practitioners;
 - provide the samples, the list of contents of the Sacred Oils, and the letter to the family to take to their doctor for medical testing. Request that results be communicated by the medical practitioner to the Parish Leader, **and** the Manager of Worship and Prayer in writing, and preferably by email. (Please see letter)

- iv) Where medical advice indicates a significant allergic reaction to the Oil of Chrism and/or the Oil of Catechumens, and an alternate mix is required, the Office of Worship and Prayer (who has also received this advice) will, as far as possible, organise a suitable mix of oil and aromatic substance – or if absolutely necessary an oil only option – that will enable the child to be baptised and/or confirmed;

This special mix of Oil of Chrism/Catechumens will be consecrated or blessed by Bishop Michael at either a Sunday Mass at the Cathedral, OR for Confirmation, within the Confirmation liturgy at which it will be used;

- v) The child requiring the special mix of oil will need to be presented for baptism/confirmation first, to avoid any contamination with the traditional Oil of Chrism.
- vi) In the most extreme cases, where a child suffers from allergies so severe it is impossible to source a suitable oil and aromatic substance, the Manager of Worship and Prayer will engage in further conversation with Bishop Michael to explore alternate options.

Composition of the Sacred Oils for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle (2024)

The Chrism we are using for 2024 is prepared by the Diocese of Cairns and used by a significant number of dioceses across Australia and beyond.

The mix of the **Oil of Chrism** is as follows:

94 % Olive Oil. This year some olive oil from the Holy Land has been included in the mix.

6 % Chrism.

The **Oil of Catechumens** is 100% Olive Oil

The composition of the Chrism is as follows:

Myrrh oil (*Commiphora myrrha*) is the primary perfume. Its long list of constituent chemical components does include *elemol*, *eugenol*, *cinnamic aldehyde*, and *dipentene* or *limonene*, but all in low proportions.

Clove leaf oil (*Syzygium aromaticum* / *Caryophyllus aromaticus* / *Eugenia caryophyllata*) contains *vanillin*, as do many balsams; bud oil contains high levels of *eugenol* with negative reactions in 1% skin patch tests so is never used; leaf oil does not have detectable levels of *eugenol*.

Elemi oil (*Canarium luzonicum*), belonging to the same family as Myrrh, contains *elemol* and *dipentene*. Patch tests at 8% produced no significant effect on humans; the balsam has 12.5% elemi oil, and the prepared Chrism has less than 1%.

Guaiacwood oil or *oil of guaiac* (*Bulnesia/Gonopterodendron sarmientoi*) is a fixative also used to give soap a rose-like fragrance. Its constituent component *guaiacol* is used in the synthetic production of *eugenol* and *vanillin*. It is not considered irritating, sensitizing, or phototoxic to human skin.

Gurjun balsam oil (*Dipterocarpus turbinatus*), also known as **East Indian copaiba**, has not been demonstrated to be irritating, allergenic, or phototoxic to human skin. Its function in this mixture is both aromatic and fixative.

Himalayan Cedarwood oil is from a type of cypress (*Cupressus deodara*). Although some cypress timbers contain β -Thujaplicin which has contact allergenic properties it has never been detected in the distilled oils.

Peru balsam oil (*Myroxylon pereirae / Toluifera pereirae*) is composed of about 60% simple chemicals (*cinnamic acid, benzyl cinnamate, vanillin, benzyl benzoate and benzoic acid*) and 40% resins, it has medicinal use (e.g., in *Friar's Balsam*), and is used as a flavouring in food and drinks, and in toiletries and perfumes.

Cinnamon leaf oil (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*) has similar aromatic properties to the bark oil, but it has such a low level of *cinnamic aldehyde* that it does not produce negative reactions. Bark oil **must never be used** because it contains about 90% of the characteristic *cinnamic aldehyde* or *cinnamaldehyde*, and in such a concentration it is a skin irritant even when diluted in the Chrism.

Supporting documents

This Pastoral Guidance is accompanied by two additional documents to facilitate easy communication with families and medical practitioners.

Attachment 1: DoMN Sacred Oils 2024 – Composition

Attachment 2: Allergies and Sacred Oils – Medical Letter Template

If you have any questions, or require another copy of the Medical Letter Template please contact the Manager of Worship and Prayer as indicated below.

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on behalf of the Diocesan Liturgy Council

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