

## **GUIDELINES re THE LITURGICAL USE OF OIL**

*In what follows the intention is NOT to indicate that the use of oil is in any way being promoted other perhaps than in the context of healing; the intention is simply to ensure that when it is used optionally this is done in a manner that is appropriate and liturgically informed. These guidelines are mainly concerned with public and liturgical worship rather than with what is done more informally*

*There are, traditionally, three oils used at worship.*

*One, the oil of catechumens, has been associated with the making of the sign of the cross on the heads of those to be baptised*

*Another, the oil of chrism, has been used after baptism as a sign of our incorporation through that sacrament into the prophetic, royal and priestly life of Jesus himself*

*The third, the oil for the anointing of the sick, is a biblical sign both of healing and forgiveness*

*Where any or all of these are used, these guidelines may be found to be helpful*

God often chooses the everyday things of life to use as symbols of his grace for all people. By them he makes his presence felt in the world. Oil reminds us of God's endless generosity to us, and the eternal nature of his love. The richness of this symbol of blessing is associated in the New Testament with Jesus Christ, the anointed one, and with the anointing of Christians in the Holy Spirit. As with all symbolic actions, the liturgical use of oil if carried out at all must be performed strongly and abundantly so that the nature of God's action is made known more clearly. It is customary that the oil of chrism – olive oil perfumed with balsam - is always blessed by a bishop. A resource for a chrism Eucharist, where all three oils are often prayerfully prepared, as well as for receiving oils into a parish, is provided in *Common Worship: Times and Seasons*.(p 278) These oils are a reminder of the priestly and royal character of the ministry of *all* the baptised (1 Peter 2.9) and hence the provision for all the people of God to receive anointing as part of the prayer for personal renewal at the Pentecost Eucharist has much to commend it (*Times and Seasons*, p. 493)

HEALING – The use of oil in the ministry of healing and laying on of hands is rooted in the most ancient practices of the church. When Jesus sent out the Twelve to share in his mission, they anointed the sick with oil (Mark 6.13) and it was the practice of the first Christians (James 5.14). The 2004 *Book of Common Prayer* provides a framework for anointing with oil (p. 448/9). The sensitive use of this ministry is greatly to be encouraged. The oil used at this service, which should be pure olive oil,

may be consecrated – if this has not previously been done for example at the chrism Eucharist – by the bishop or priest who presides. The prayer for sanctifying the oil provided in the Prayer Book can provide a focus of prayerful thanksgiving before the actual anointing.

**BAPTISM** - If (and it is very much an option) the candidate is to be anointed before the act of baptism takes place, pure olive oil should be used, reflecting the practice of athletes preparing for a contest (the oil of catechumens). It is appropriately used at the time of the making of the sign of the cross on the forehead of the candidate.

If anointing takes place after the act of baptism, the oil of chrism should be used as a sign of the richness of the Holy Spirit (which is referred to in terms of anointing in the New Testament – 1 John 2. 20-27 and II Corinthians 1. 21-22), to echo the scriptural anointing of kings (1 Samuel 16.13), our royal priesthood (1 Peter 2.9) and the seal of the saints (Revelation 7.3). Its relationship with the name ‘Christ’, the anointed one, is a reminder that each baptism is related to the baptism of Jesus. Anointing with oil should however NOT obscure the central act of baptism being the dipping of the candidates in water or the pouring of water over them in the name of the Trinity. The anointing is an option which may be helpful to make the meaning of baptism clear – but it adds nothing to the baptism itself. Thus a helpful place to do it may be after the congregation have received and welcomed the new member; the anointing then becomes a further demonstration of the meaning of incorporation into the royal priesthood of the church.

**CONFIRMATION** - If oil is to be used at services of Confirmation (an option the use of which is entirely at the discretion of the bishop with sensitivity to the local situation), it should again be the oil of chrism, used to indicate the sealing of the Holy Spirit and the strengthening of the candidate for service. Here too it should not detract from the central action of prayer with the laying on of hands. The anointing might take place after the Confirmation and before the Commission, but never in such a way as to imply that without it either baptism or confirmation is in any way incomplete.

**ORDINATION** – The Berkeley Consultation on Ordination Liturgy which was held by the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation and which considerably informed the contents of the revised ordinal in the Irish Prayer Book of 2004, was inclined to the view that anointing at ordination needed very careful consideration and could bring an element of confusion to the rite. Indeed there is a danger that anointing in this context could create an unhelpful sense of separation between the

ordained and the other Christians whose ministry derives from their baptism. If a bishop agrees with an ordinand that anointing around the time of ordination may have some particular value, it is suggested that this be done in a devotional context perhaps separate from the ordination service itself. In such a situation, the bishop might consider anointing either the head or the palms of the hands of those to be ordained as priests with chrism. However, these guidelines should not be seen as recommending this practice, or indeed a further anointing of the head of a person being ordained to the episcopate.

It may also be appropriate to consider the use of oil at the Celebration of a New Ministry, as opposed to an actual ordination