

The Disposal and Replacement of the Paschal Candle

What is the appropriate protocol to dispose of old paschal candles?

The first response must be that **they may not be reused**. The paschal candle must be renewed each year and receive its blessing at the Paschal Vigil. *Paschale Sollemnitatis*, the 1988 Circular Letter concerning the preparation and celebration of the Easter feasts, states that the paschal candle must “be renewed each year” (no. 82). This does not mean that the old candle must be thrown away. Most suppliers of candles accept the return of used candles (and will sometimes even offer a discount for the exchange). These suppliers will then **recycle the wax** to produce new candles. If, for some reason, a parish is unable to recycle the candle wax, then the old paschal candle, as a blessed object (a sacramental) must be appropriately disposed of. This could involve **burning the candle** in a devotional manner (privately as opposed to publically and liturgically) **or even burying the candle** in blessed ground. Candles are made to be burned, however, and it is better to find a way either to recycle or burn the wax.

As a reminder, *Paschale Sollemnitatis*, nos. 83 and 99, offers good advice regarding an option for the procession with the paschal candle during the Vigil, and regarding proper use of the candle after the Vigil for Easter and for the rest of the year:

83. The **procession**, by which the people enter the church, should be led by the light of the paschal candle alone. Just as the children of Israel were guided at night by a pillar of fire, so similarly Christians follow the risen Christ. There is no reason why to each response “Thanks be to God” there should not be added some acclamation in honor of Christ.

99. The paschal candle has **its proper place** either by the ambo or by the altar and should be lit at least in all the more solemn liturgical celebrations of the season until Pentecost Sunday, whether at Mass, or at Morning and Evening Prayer. After the Easter season the candle should be kept with honor in the baptistery, so that in the celebration of Baptism the candles of the baptized may be lit from it. In the celebration of funerals the paschal candle should be placed near the coffin to indicate that the death of a Christian is his own Passover. The paschal candle should not otherwise be lit nor placed in the sanctuary outside the Easter season.

Finally, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states the following regarding the **use of incense for the paschal candle**, “Three swings of the thurible are used to incense: the Most Blessed Sacrament, a relic of the Holy Cross and images of the Lord exposed for public veneration, the offerings for the Sacrifice of the Mass, the altar cross, the *Book of the Gospels*, the paschal candle, the Priest, and the people” (no. 277).

