

**Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy**  
**Newsletter**  
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Use of Candles in the Liturgy

The Secretariat of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy has received a number of inquiries in the last year concerning the Church's norms governing the use of candles and oil lamps in the liturgy. Many have asked whether oil lamps may be used as substitutes for candles during the celebration of the liturgy. The last time this question was addressed by the Secretariat was in the June-July 1974 edition of this *Newsletter*

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) states the following with regard to the use of candles: "The candles, which are required at every liturgical service out of reverence and on account of the festiveness of the celebration (cf.no.117), are to be appropriately placed either on or around the altar in a way suited to the design of the altar and the sanctuary so that the whole may be well balanced and not interfere with the faithful's clear view of what takes place on the altar or what is placed on it"(no. 307; see also no. 117). In a 1974 interpretation of the previous GIRM 269, the Congregation for Divine Worship noted that the GIRM "makes no further determination regarding the material" of which candles are made "except in the case of the sanctuary lamp, the fuel for which must be oil or wax." The Congregation then went on to recall "the faculty that the conferences of bishops possess to choose suitable materials."

Since the National Conference of Catholic Bishops has never employed the above-noted faculty to permit the use of materials other than wax in the production of candles, the use of such other materials either as a substitute for or in imitation of candles is not permitted in the liturgy. Therefore, oil lamps may be used only "in the case of the sanctuary lamp," as indicated above. Candles made of wax are to be used in the celebration of the Mass and other liturgical rites. Furthermore, because of their very nature, imitations of candles should not be used in the liturgy as, for example, "permanent" paschal candles, nor should electric bulbs be used in liturgical celebration. In the interests of authenticity and symbolism, it is likewise unfitting that so-called electric vigil lights be used for devotional purposes.