CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO
ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

Prot. n. 824/08/L,

Rome, 1 September 2008

Your Eminence,

This Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has received reports of the abuse of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick occurring in various places in South Africa.

It is reported that the faithful are frequently being anointed, during the course of what are called “Healing Services,” by deacons or even lay ministers, who use a so-called “Oil of Gladness” that is claimed to be a Sacramental.

This Dicastery observes that canon 1003, §1 expressly forbids anyone other than a priest to administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Furthermore, as the Inter-Dicasterial Instruction Ecclesiae de mysterio, art. 9, makes clear: “No other person [than a priest] may act as ordinary or extraordinary minister of the sacrament [of Anointing] since such constitutes simulation of the sacrament” (15 August 1997).

This Congregation also observes that there are only three blessed oils used in the Roman Ritual, namely, the Oil of Catechumens, the Oil of the Sick, and the Sacred Chrism. The use of any other oil or any other “anointing” than those found in the approved liturgical books must be considered proscribed and subject to ecclesiastical penalties (cf. canons 1379 and 1384).

This Congregation kindly asks that the Bishops of South Africa be made aware of the abovementioned confusion so that proper catechesis and sacramental discipline can be restored where it may be lacking. The Congregation would be grateful for a brief comment from Your Eminence on the current situation in South Africa in this regard.

With every prayerful good wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

(+ Albert Malcolm Ranjith)
Archbishop Secretary

His Eminence
Wilfrid Fox Cardinal NAPIER
President of the Conference of Bishops of South Africa
SOUTH AFRICA