

Making a Paschal Candle

by Jocelyn Bergen



Creating Our Own Large Pillar Candle for a Paschal Candle

Here at All Souls Parish, we have a marvelous tradition of melting down our (100% beeswax) used-up altar candles each year to make the next year's Paschal Candle, which we then decorate with custom artwork. The candle is first lit in the new fire at the start of the Easter Vigil service, the Saturday night before Easter Sunday, and then brought out and lit throughout the year for baptisms and funerals.

This project is somewhat time intensive, but very rewarding. It takes two days, with one full day actively attended. The entire first day is needed for melting wax, pouring, poking relief holes, waiting, and pouring in more melted wax. It takes another day to completely cool in order to release it from the mold.



SUPPLIES

- Approximately 10 lbs. 100% beeswax - we use last year's altar candle stubs
- 3" ABS black plastic pipe, cut to desired length; we used 38" in this example
- Wick, 5-6 years or at least 3.5x the length of the candle; round shape for beeswax
- Candle release powder
- Candle release spray
- Rubber gasket material, 4" square
- Candle mold putty
- 2-3 1/4" wooden dowels, 48" long
- Chopstick or small stick
- Aluminum foil (if using turkey pans)

EQUIPMENT

- 3 large candle wax melting pitchers
- 3 pots to hold warm water, OR 2 aluminum turkey pans
- Cutting board
- Knife
- Tongs
- Darning needle
- Binder clip
- Old sheet and/or old towel
- Baseball bat or stick
- Milk crate
- 2 bungee cords



Weighing last year's candle stubs.



Trimming off the burnt ends.

1. PREPARING THE CANDLES TO MELT

Get the old candle stubs from the previous year. Weigh the candles – we use a shipping scale.

For the example 34-38" candle, 3" wide, you need about 10 lb. of wax. To confirm this or learn more, you can search for a candle wax calculator online.

Prioritize the candles by pulling out the larger ones first. Trim the tops and bottoms so there are no burnt ends in the wax. You may have to cut longer stubs down to fit in the pitcher.



Beginning to melt the candle stubs.



Wax fully melted and ready to pour.

2. MELTING THE WAX

Use three candle wax pitchers in three pots to hold the warm water. Depending on how wide the pot is, put a cookie cutter in the bottom to elevate the pitcher to keep it off the bottom; alternatively you may be able to hook the pitcher's handle on the side of the pot. Keep a few inches of water in the pots at all times. Distribute most of the candle stubs into the three pitchers.

Alternatively if you are using the turkey-pan double-boiler method, use 2 burners under the large pans to melt the wax (gas is recommended rather than electric). You can use aluminum foil to make a "snake" to hold up the second pan in the water to create a double boiler. Keep about 1/2" of water at all times in the bottom part.

Turn on the heat to low-medium and begin melting the wax. It takes 2-3 hours to melt this large of a quantity. As the candle stubs melt, fish out the old wicks and set aside - they make great fire starters for camping.

Safety Note: You must have someone tending the melting wax on the stove at all times.

3. MAKING THE WICK

Take the wick and measure out 3.5 times the length of the candle and split into thirds. Braid the top 14" since it's likely that only half that amount, at the most, will burn down through the year.

Hang the wick on a small stick or chopstick, stuck through one of the top sections of the braid. Weight it to hang straight and stay stretched by using a binder clip to hold it until ready to dip.

Take off the clip, dip the wick into melted wax, pull it tight and straight, then put aside for later.



The braided top of the 3-part wick.



Spraying candle release spray into the mold tube.



Creating the bottom seal with a rubber gasket and putty.



Mold set upright with crate and bungees.



Holding the wick with a chopstick at the top of the mold.

4. PREPARING THE MOLD

For this large a candle you cannot purchase a metal mold big enough. So, we use a length of black ABS plastic pipe that is 3" in diameter which matches our candle holder sleeve. We make candles between 36 - 40" tall. The pipe tends to come in 10' lengths so it must be cut down – a hacksaw works well for that task.

After you cut the length of pipe you need, prepare it by making sure it is clean inside, no dust or dirt. You can do this by passing a towel through using the stick. Then spray the candle mold release spray inside liberally, or, alternatively, coat with canola oil. This will help the candle release when it is time to remove it from the mold.

Hang the wick from the top of the mold tube using a skewer or chopstick stuck into one of the braid loops at the top. The other ends will just dangle at the other open end for now.

Cover the bottom with a thick piece of rubber – we use a piece of rubber gasket from the hardware store (red color). First poke a hole in the middle of the rubber with the darning needle, then thread the bottom of the wick threads through the hole, pulling them tight and tying a knot. Seal where the wick comes through the gasket as well as the bottom of the tube to the rubber using candle mold putty, looped all the way around and pressed to seal.

Hold the mold upright, make sure the top of the wick on the stick is pulled tight from the knotted end, then pour a little melted wax into the bottom of the tube to finish the seal.

Set up the mold in the crate. Put newspaper or an old sheet on the floor to protect it. Support the mold tube with 2 bungee cords to keep it upright and straight.

It is recommended to set this up close to the stove if possible, but in a spot that is out of the way so it will not get jarred or knocked over by unknowing passerby.



Pouring almost all the wax in the first pour.



Stopping 1-2" away from the top of the mold.



Wax cooled; time for the second pour.



Holes created with a dowel to pour more wax into the inside.

5. POURING THE WAX

Add candle release powder to the melted wax, following instructions on the package. We used 7-8 teaspoons per pound of beeswax but some products call for less. Let the powder melt fully into the wax.

If you use the turkey-pan method, and feel you can do it safely, you now pick up and use the pan itself to pour the melted wax into the mold in one pass. This can be a bit ungainly and tricky, so take care and wear gloves.

If you use multiple wax pitchers, pour the wax into the tube one pitcher at a time until the mold is full, stopping about 2" from the top. Move from one to the next as quickly as possible, so as to not create a visible horizontal line or a weak spot in the candle. This is where having a helper is extremely valuable.

You should still have about 25-30% of the melted wax left; keep it on a low flame on the stove to keep it liquid and ready for the next pour.

As the wax cools it will shrink, so you need to create space in the center of the candle to pour in more wax. After 1-2 hours, when the wax has cooled somewhat, take one of the dowels and gently push in 3 or 4 holes between the edge and the center of the candle. We have needed to do 3-4 pours for this size candle, using a fresh dowel for each pour since they get coated with wax and get too wide.

Leave between 1-3 hours between pours. Stop when the dowel will not go down into the wax anymore. Take care to work in a moderately warm environment; too cool may make the candle cool too quickly and form cracks or channels. You want the candle to cool down slowly – this process cannot be rushed.

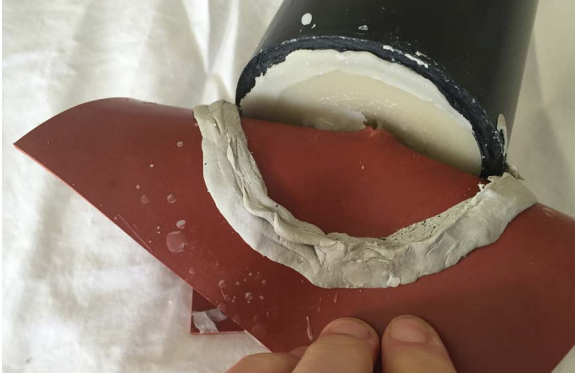
Once you have finished all the pours, let the candle cool a full 24 hours. Do not be tempted to try to release the candle before then.

6. RELEASING THE CANDLE FROM THE MOLD

Prepare a clean space on a table or counter; cover with the white sheet, with a towel underneath for padding. Lay the mold on the surface and take out the chopstick from the wick top. Remove the bottom seal as well.

See if the candle will begin to slide out if you pull one of the ends, tugging gently at the wick. If it slides, pull it out, or pull it out as far as you can. If it will not move, try tapping gently, holding a towel over the mold, with a stick or baseball bat to release it.

Be ready to place the candle on a clean smooth cloth such as the sheet. Once completed, the candle is now ready for decoration, and the wick can be trimmed accordingly.



Removing the bottom seal.



Beginning to pull the candle out of the mold.



Continuing to remove the candle from the mold.



The finished candle, ready for decoration.



The author, happy with the new candle.

Grateful thanks to Kelly Marston for developing the process and teaching me how to make candles in this way, and to Rebecca Ghanadan for documenting and assisting in the process.