

# From the Parish Nurse

## Proper Disposal of Medications

The following article has been adapted from “How to Dispose of Unused Medications” found at <http://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm101653.htm>

Is your medicine cabinet filled with expired drugs or medications you no longer use? How should you dispose of them? The Office of National Drug Control Policy has issued the following federal guidelines that should be followed when getting rid of prescription (and over-the-counter) medications.

- Follow any specific disposal instructions on the drug label or patient information that comes with the medication. Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet unless this information specifically instructs you to do so. (About a dozen drugs, such as powerful narcotic pain relievers and other controlled substances, carry instructions for flushing to reduce the danger of unintentional use or overdose and illegal abuse.)
- If no instructions are given, throw the drugs in the household trash, but first:
  - Take them out of their original containers and mix them with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter. The medication will be less appealing to children and pets, and unrecognizable to people who may intentionally go through your trash.
  - Put them in a sealable bag, empty can, or other container to prevent the medication from leaking or breaking out of a garbage bag.

Some additional tips:

- Before throwing out a medicine container, scratch out all identifying information on the prescription label to make it unreadable. This will help protect your identity and the privacy of your personal health information.
- Do not give your prescription medications to others. Doctors prescribe drugs based on a person's specific symptoms and medical history. A drug that works for you could be dangerous for someone else.
- When in doubt about proper disposal, talk to your pharmacist.

You can keep your family and community safe by following these guidelines.