

THE DECEMBER 1955 ISSUE OF *TIME* MAGAZINE suggested that a priest with a large parish would appreciate receiving a Sacra-kit for Christmas. By then, this “portable sick-call set for dignity and convenience in administering at the bedside” had been manufactured by the Leslie A. Calhoun Company of Minneapolis for about three years.

The Calhoun company was not a large firm, and its history is more a family story than a business saga. Father Alfred Wagner, a Catholic priest, tired of carrying the equipment needed to make sick calls in his pockets. For his own use he created the first Sacra-kit, filling a small case with the ritual needs for a home or hospital visit. When his priest friends asked for kits, Father Wagner approached his brother-in-law, Leslie A. Calhoun, an accountant with Peat Marwick Mitchell in Minneapolis, with the idea of manufacturing kits for sale. They would contain candles and a crucifix, an ablution cup, linen cloth, oil reservoir, and holy water bottle. In the drawer below the “altar,” a priest would carry his own stole, missal, pyx, purificator, and other sick-call needs.

For the kits, Father Wagner also invented an ablution cup that the Calhoun company trademarked as the Sacra-sink. In ministering to the sick, the priest had to purify his fingers in holy water. The Sacra-sink, a plexi-glas container with no lid, allowed a little bit of water to be tipped into a reservoir for the priest’s fingers and then tipped back into the container. The ingenious design prevented spills, regardless of the cup’s position.

Calhoun formed his company exclusively to manufacture and wholesale the Sacra-kit, which he retailed nationally through Catholic supply outlets. Carrying cases from various luggage manufacturers were delivered to his home and filled by his family. Mary E. (Wagner) Calhoun, his wife, made the altar cloths.

When Catholic ritual changed as a result of Vatican II in 1963, demand for the Sacra-kit diminished. By 1972 the Calhoun company was out of business, having sold 6,012 Sacra-kits. Charles G. Calhoun, who helped assemble the kits as a child, donated this example to the Minnesota Historical Society. —*Claudia Nicholson*

Sacra-kit (approximately 11 x 10 x 4 inches), with its trademarked ablution cup resting on the altar. The oil reservoir, which would be placed between the candles, is missing; the pyx (open, in front of case) was not sold with the kit.





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