



Diocese of Salina

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Office of the Bishop

Mass Stipends to Increase

For a great many years the customary Mass stipend in the Province of Kansas City in Kansas (the four dioceses within the State of Kansas) has been five dollars. The bishops of each province determine the amount of the Mass stipend. On January 17, 2014, during our provincial meeting, we, the Bishops of Kansas, decided to designate the customary Mass stipend within Kansas to be ten dollars as of ***May 1, 2014***. This brings the ordinary stipend amount into conformity with many dioceses around us.

While this is not a critical matter we believe that this is a good time for some appropriate catechesis on the topic of Mass stipends.

We must begin by noting that the Sacraments of the Church are not bought and sold. Any semblance of trafficking in sacred matters is not only distasteful but sinful. It likewise must be noted that priests are to celebrate the Mass intentions of the faithful who approach them in good faith regardless of whether or not a stipend is offered. Moreover, in every Mass the priest celebrates, the prayers also benefit the whole Church. Each Sunday the local pastor celebrates at least one Mass intention for the people he serves. Building upon these essential points, it may be helpful to understand the history of how Mass stipends evolved and how the Church views them today.

The ancient custom of offering a stipend to a priest in response for his offering Mass began when the Church was quite poor. The money that a priest received for celebrating his daily Mass for a specific intention was oftentimes his sole source of income. In many poor countries today a priest's Mass stipend remains a primary source of his support. While Mass stipends in developed nations do not serve the same purpose today, the Church's laws surrounding the teaching on Mass stipends remains essentially the same.

Canon 946 of the *Code of Canon Law* notes that when members of the faithful offer a Mass stipend they are contributing to the good of the Church, for they are sharing in the Church's concern for the support of her ministers. But the Mass stipend is not only about the priest. From the perspective of the faithful, by offering to help with the priest's essential support, the one offering the stipend also enters into the Sacrifice of the Mass in a sacrificial way. This has been found to be spiritually meaningful for Catholics around the world.

There are laws (canons) which govern how priests must treat Mass stipends. For instance, it is worth noting that the Mass stipend is a gift to the individual priest, not to the parish. Moreover, Mass intentions are not required to be published, although many priests do, and if a priest chooses only to concelebrate Mass on a given day, instead of serving as the main

celebrant of the Mass, he may still accept a stipend for his intention. Priests may accept only one stipend per Mass. When a priest celebrates several Masses on a particular day, he may keep only one stipend per day for himself, the exception being at Christmas. Any additional stipends must be forwarded to a charitable cause determined by the Bishop of the Diocese.

Priests may only accept as many Mass stipends as they can fulfill in one year's time. For this reason a priest sometimes will send excess Mass stipends to the local chancery to be distributed to needy priests or to be shared with parishes in mission countries. In all these ways the Church struggles to remain faithful to the ancient custom of Mass stipends without giving any indication of trafficking in financial gain for something as sacred as the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

With this in mind, one could ask, "So why raise the customary stipend at this time?" To address that question we must keep in mind the fact that the spiritual value of a Mass is infinite. No amount of money could ever represent what is offered in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. To enable people to enter into a spirit of sharing in the concern of the Church for her ministers, the customary amount should not be so great as to make it a hardship for people to approach their pastors for this spiritual benefit; and likewise, the amount should not be so small as if to imply that the Mass itself were somehow an incidental matter. As the balance is delicate, a change is made only after considerable consultation and, as noted above, a review of neighboring dioceses and provinces.

With this background and understanding before us, we, the Bishops of Kansas, have concluded that it is appropriate to raise the suggested offering for a Mass stipend. Again, the faithful should never hesitate to approach the pastors of the Church for this spiritual assistance regardless of whether they can offer a stipend or not. The only essential requirement is the good intention of the faithful.

Archbishop Joseph Naumann, Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas

Bishop John Brungardt, Diocese of Dodge City

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