

MESSAGE FOR PRIESTS AND FAITHFUL

On the Subject of Offerings Given for the Celebration of Mass

Various misunderstandings about the tradition of Mass offerings and clear dangers of exploitation of the Mass can easily emerge. For this reason, the Irish Bishops wish to make clear the Church's position on Mass Offerings. The following is a brief summary of the Church's teaching and regulation regarding Mass Offerings.

1. The Eucharist, the 'source and summit of the Christian life,' is at the heart of our belief, for it preserves the great mystery of our redemption in Jesus Christ. Therefore anything that might weaken or undermine our respect for the Eucharist must be avoided.
2. The practice of giving an offering dates back to the early Church when the faithful brought bread and wine for the Mass and other gifts for the support of the priest and for the poor. Nowadays a Mass offering is a way for the donor to join him/herself to the sacrifice of the Mass; it unites the donor closely with the life and apostolic activity of the Church, the Body of Christ, as the offering becomes a form of material support for the Church's ministers and pastoral life. The Mass must never be an occasion for 'buying and selling' or 'making money', nor should there be even the slightest appearance of making a profit from Mass offerings.
3. Normally a separate Mass is celebrated for each individual offering, however small. The donor specifies the individual intention and it is up to the donor to decide what amount to give. Because donors may sometimes ask how much it is appropriate to give, a current recommended diocesan offering is specified; (this amount is agreed by the Bishops at provincial level). A priest may accept less than the recommended offering – and many priests on occasion do.
4. The priest who receives the offering has an obligation to apply Mass for the specific intention of the person who has made the offering. He is to celebrate a Mass within a reasonable time. Irrespective of how many Masses he celebrates in a day, a priest may only keep an offering for one Mass per day. If a priest receives too

many Mass intentions he must transfer any surplus Mass offerings, in total, to another priest; (normally these offerings will be sent to priests working in needy areas).

5. The Church does not encourage 'collective' or 'multi-intentional' Masses but sees these as an exception. In these exceptional cases, the following must apply:

- a) It must be made explicitly clear to the donor beforehand that the offering is being combined into a single Mass offering and the donor must give free consent to this.
- b) The place, date and time for this Mass should be indicated publicly and such Masses may not be celebrated any more than two days weekly in any church.
- c) The priest who celebrates Mass for a collective intention must not keep any more than the specified diocesan offering, and must transfer any additional amount, in accordance with canon law, for the purposes prescribed by the Bishop/Provincial.

6. Having signed or stamped Mass Cards for sale to the public in shops and other commercial outlets is a practice that is not approved by the Irish Episcopal Conference, the Major Religious Superiors or the Superiors of Missionary Societies. It undermines a correct Eucharistic Theology and is unacceptable. We ask that this practice, wherever it exists, be discontinued.

7. We strongly encourage the donor, where possible, to participate in the Mass. We recommend that the intention for which the Mass is being especially offered is mentioned in the Prayer of the Faithful. Of course the Mass is not *exclusively* for this intention - every Mass is offered for all people, especially those in need.

The Church's norms and regulations about Mass offerings are clearly set out in the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* and in the 1991 Decree *Mos Iugiter*.
