

# Diocese issues policy on stipends and offerings

*Editor's note: The following is the updated diocesan policy with regard to stipends and offerings issued by Bishop Jaime Soto, effective July 1, 2021. The updated policy has been sent to all priests and parish finance councils.*

It is a fundamental tenet of Christian revelation that the grace of God is free. Salvation is pure gift, an act of extravagant generosity from God that no human being can ever hope to merit or pay back.

Therefore, any practice that would imply that a Catholic must pay for the sacraments would be contrary to the Church's understanding of God's love for the sinner, especially the poor. The ancient words of Isaiah express well the joyful understanding that governs all Church policy regarding money and religion:

*All you who are thirsty, come to the water!  
You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat;  
Come, without paying and without cost,  
Drink wine and milk!*

The Catholic faithful are also encouraged to bring their offering to the altar. (Mt. 5.23; Acts 2.44-46; I Cor. 16.1-4) These gestures express one's gratitude to God. The portion one returns to the Lord recognizes that all good things come from Him. The offering also expresses our collaboration in the building up of the Kingdom. The extensive sacramental, teaching, and charitable works of the Church are a reflection of the generous, sacrificial offerings of the People of God.

Priests, who have dedicated their lives to preaching the Good News of the Gospel, must have an adequate means of support. The Church has an obligation to guarantee that material support. However, the Church is careful to provide for its priests in a way that does not give the impression that they are

somehow providing services for which they should be paid. For this reason, dioceses today mandate that priests get institutional remuneration from the parish or diocese in which they serve that is sufficient to support a reasonable standard of living. This remuneration is standardized throughout each diocese. In the Sacramento Diocese, that average annual base remuneration is approximately \$37,000. Room and board are also provided.

Priests are allowed to accept monetary offerings from the people when celebrating a sacrament, but it must be clear that the offering is given freely and the donor may choose how much to give. Moreover, the sacrament should be gladly available, whether or not this offering is made.

The same is true of offerings for sacramentals, such as blessings of houses or automobiles. In these cases, Diocesan regulations stipulate that the offering goes to the work of the parish, not to the priests personally.

The donor should choose how much to give on those occasions, and the blessings should be gladly available whether or not parishioners want to give an offering. In the Sacramento Diocese, priests are expressly forbidden from soliciting, either directly or indirectly, any offerings for blessings. Parishioners may, however, freely make an offering to the priest in addition to that specified for the parish. The priest may not ask for it.

The Code of Canon Law deliberately uses the term *offering* rather than *stipend* when referring to those monies (associated with sacraments and sacramentals) because the word *stipend* suggests a commercial exchange of goods for services, which this is not meant to be. In the sensitive area of money, it is the mind of the Church that even the appearance

of trafficking in God’s free grace be always avoided.

The offerings described above are distinct from another common form of giving in parish life: the practice of requesting a specific sum of money (“a suggested offering”) for the use of Church facilities when baptisms, weddings, or funerals take place. Those donations are akin to an exchange of goods for services because the parishioner donates towards the financial support of the parish in exchange for use of the parish’s buildings, and many parishes depend on this income to pay for the upkeep of its buildings and other expenses.

It should be remembered that the money given is a donation, and pastors should grant special consideration to parishioners who cannot afford the suggested offering. The overriding principle is that a parishioner must never be denied access to a sacrament because of money.

Following are the specific policies governing offerings in the Sacramento Diocese:

For Mass offerings, the suggested amount is \$10. This figure is the same for all dioceses in the Province of San Francisco. The priest can only receive one offering per Mass per day. This is a universal law set by the Church. If a family wishes to have several people named, that is acceptable, but the offering remains the same.

If the priest celebrates more than one Mass in a day, the second offering (and any additional offerings) are to be given to the parish.

The suggested offerings throughout the diocese are as follows:

Baptisms	\$50
Weddings	\$500*

\*(The diocesan Bishop may grant an exception to this norm for particular circumstances.)

Quinceañeras	\$250
Funerals	\$200
House Blessings	
And other buildings	\$20
Automobile Blessings	\$20

Any donation received for baptisms, weddings, quinceañeras, or blessings of houses, automobiles, or any other building or blessing, go to the support of the parish. If a gift, over and above the parish offering, is made freely and spontaneously to the priest, he may keep it; however, priests are prohibited from soliciting, directly or indirectly, any offering on such occasions.

Funeral offerings are made to the parish. In certain cases, diocesan policy allows for the parish to give this to the priest as part of his agreed compensation.

The Faithful have the custom of contributing to the offering on All Souls Day for the eternal repose of their dearly departed. The contributions of the Faithful will be given to the local parish. All priests will receive \$600 with the stipulation that they are each to offer 30 Masses for the eternal repose of the Faithful Departed.

**+Jaime Soto**  
**Bishop of Sacramento**