

**MASS OFFERINGS**

**In light of our Eucharistic Theology**

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## Foreword

Throughout our Diocese, priests, pastoral ministers, and parish secretaries often hear parishioners use terms like: "I'd like to buy amass," or "how much does a mass cost?" There seems to be a need for education among all the people of our Diocese about the meaning of Mass Offerings. This booklet and the companion set of bulletin inserts highlights our Catholic teaching about the Eucharist itself, and about the purpose and meaning of offerings given for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is hoped that this series will first of all enhance our understanding and love for the Eucharist, and also will explain how Mass Offerings fit into our Eucharistic theology.

Mass Offerings in light of our Eucharistic Theology  
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### A word from Bishop Sherlock

It is with great pleasure that I give my approbation for these materials which have been produced in order to educate people about the reality of Mass Offerings. This question has been raised on repeated occasions in our Diocese in the last thirty years. Always there has been an implicit presumption and sometimes an explicit statement that the faithful do not understand the meaning of "Mass Stipends". Rather than either analyzing the truth of that assumption or debating whether in fact it is true, this committee has accepted to educate all of us about the importance of Mass Stipends and their significant relation to the self offering which we make in union with Jesus each time Mass is celebrated.

I am grateful to this education committee of the Council of Priests, and pray that their efforts will result in a deepened understanding and a far more profound appreciation of Holy Mass.

In Christ,

Most Rev. J.M. Sherlock  
Bishop of London

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### **The Eucharist: Joining our Personal Self-offerings to the Offering of Christ**

At the end of the twentieth century the Roman Catholic community struggles to understand the meaning of Mass Offerings within the context of the way we celebrate mass. For some, Mass Offerings are associated with money collected during the Preparation of Gifts within the Liturgy. As it stands today; however, the Mass Offering and the collection are two distinct actions.

A Historical Glance at "the Offering of Gifts": In the early church the bread and wine used for the celebration of Eucharist were brought from the households of the faithful. St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians reflects the difficulty that arose when the Eucharist was celebrated in the context of a meal. Those who ate lavishly at these meals often failed to care for the members of the Body who had little. The Church quickly shaped its practice to eliminate this injustice.

In the fourth and fifth centuries other material goods (grains, animals; clothing) were also presented to be shared among those in need. People viewed this action as a tangible way to participate in the sacrifice of thanksgiving, to return to the Creator of all good, the goods of the earth.

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### **Mass offerings in light of Eucharistic Theology**

At Rome and Africa, the faithful formed a procession with these gifts. Elsewhere, the offerings were placed in the sacristy before the celebration with the deacons bringing them to the altar at the beginning of the liturgy of the Eucharist. In Gaul, the procession with the gifts took on the pageantry of the Eastern Rite. Yet each of these patterns anticipated what the gifts would become in the eucharistic prayer-the risen Jesus present under the form of these tangible "fruits of the earth and works of human hands".

In the sixth and seventh centuries, we find examples of Papal liturgy where the gifts were presented with highly formalized choreography. The Pope proceeded to the entrance of the sanctuary and first received the small loaf and flask of wine brought forward by each of the noblemen of the area. The Pope then turned to the side on which sat the women, to receive the loaf and flask of wine from each of the noble women. the flasks of wine were poured into a larger vessel, which when filled was then transferred to a very large cup with two handles (the community's common cup). The other folk presented their gifts of bread and wine, to the subdeacons. The Papal Liturgy certainly retained the sense of participation in the offering, but its particular form of celebrating this rite of offering reflects a fragmentation of the one Body of Christ.

During the eighth to the fifteenth century the meaning of the presentation of gifts faded, as the practice of receiving communion decreased, and unleavened bread was mandated for use in the Mass. Lost was the theology that the Eucharist is the prayer of Christ who draws all people into his saving death and resurrection for the glory of God, the Father. Now the focus was on Jesus, Saviour, the sacrifice of the cross, and individual prayer for release from sin. With the priest viewed as mediator, the priest's offering Mass offerings in light of Eucharistic Theology of the Mass made available the benefits or fruits of the Mass. The participation of the faithful was no longer seen as essential for the celebration. .

### **Recent Renewal of our Understanding of Eucharist:**

With the reforms of Vatican II, the role of the assembly once again became primary. This role is emphasized throughout the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, both in the spirit it conveys and in the specific details it itemizes. Here are a few.

The Eucharist is the celebration of all baptized Catholics, gathered at God's invitation to enter into the priestly prayer of Christ. Christ draws all people into his saving death and resurrection for the glory of God. Each person has a specific function within the celebration, some as presbyters (priests), others as liturgical ministers, and everyone as the assembly. To emphasize this unity of the assembly; communion should not be given from the reserved sacrament in the tabernacle, and communion from the cup may be offered to all present at the celebration.

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With the directives of the *General Instruction*, the procession of the gifts is returned to the ritual as an action of the assembly. As well, we are provided with a new clarity about the term "offering". The moment of "offering" is reserved to the eucharistic prayer. In this prayer we unite ourselves and our tangible gifts, to the offering of Christ. Bread and wine, gifts of the Creator, are returned to God that they may become the Body and Blood of Christ for the Body of Christ (the faithful), and for the world. Monetary gifts are a sign of our care for the poor, for the transformation of our world. This concept is specifically noted in the requirements for celebrating the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. There it states that gifts for the poor be gathered and presented along with the bread and the wine. This is a model for all celebrations of Eucharist. If the community celebrated

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Eucharist but is not mindful of its sisters and brothers, then it is not living Eucharist.

### **The Participation of the Baptized in the Celebration of the Eucharist**

#### **Who "Celebrates" the Eucharist:**

As we discuss the meaning of Offerings for the Mass, we need to be reminded of the importance and depth of our participation as baptized Christians in the celebration of the Eucharist. Only then can we see that our role in the practice of "Mass offerings" is not passive. The Second Vatican Council states, " ... every liturgical celebration, inasmuch as it is the act of Christ the priest and his body which is the church, is above all an activity of worship. No other activity of the church equals it in terms of its official recognition or its degree of effectiveness" (Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, # 7). This passage tells us that the liturgy is an action; it also tells us who "does" the action. First and foremost, the action is that of Jesus Christ, present in our midst, as he exercises his unique and perfect priesthood. In turn, the Church, as his Body and members on earth, participates in the priestly action of Jesus Christ. So we can then say that the "visible" or "earthly" "doer" of the liturgy is the Church as a whole. Now the Church, as it is gathered in this time and place for this celebration, is the whole assembly gathered for worship. Thus, if we ask who the "celebrant" of the liturgy is; we can rightly say that "It is the whole community, the Body of Christ, that celebrates" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 1140).

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### **The Need for Preparation and Mutual Participation**

The full effectiveness of the celebration of the Eucharist "will best be accomplished if, after due regard for the nature and circumstances of each assembly, the celebration is planned in such a way that it brings about in the faithful a participation in body and spirit that is conscious, active, full, and motivated by faith, hope and charity. The Church desires this land of participation, the nature of the celebration demands it, and for the Christian people, it is a right and duty they have by reason of their baptism" (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, # 3). In a nutshell, there are some particular ministries in the Mass, but there are no spectators!

Let us now take a look at our participation in each part of the Mass.

a) *The Gathering of the Assembly: The Introductory Rite.*

From the living of their Christian lives, the People of God come together for the celebration of Eucharist. In many ways, they have been living out their baptismal share in the Lord's work, and bringing the Gospel to the home, the work-place, society, and the life of the parish. Now, especially during the Sunday Eucharist, they come together in a way that most vividly shows the reality of who they are as one Church, the Body of Christ. This assembly, the Church called together in this time and place by God, is the first way in which Christ is present in the liturgy. The dialogues, prayers and hymns of the introductory rite have two basic purposes. "The purpose of these rites is that the faithful coming together take on the form of a community and prepare themselves to listen to God's word and celebrate the eucharist properly" (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, # 24).

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### *b) God Speaks to Us; We Listen and Respond: The Liturgy of the Word.*

We are actively engaged in the Liturgy of the Word. "In the readings, explained by the homily, God is speaking to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and nourishing their spirit; Christ is present to the faithful through his own word. Through the chants the people make God's word their own and through the profession of faith affirm their adherence to it. Finally, having been fed by his word, they make their petitions in the general intercessions for the needs of the Church and for the salvation of the whole world" (*General Instruction*, # 33). The Liturgy of the Word is thus alive with dialogue between ourselves and God: God speaks to us in the First Reading, we respond with the Psalm; God speaks in the Second Reading, we offer praise in the Gospel Acclamation; God speaks through the Gospel and homily, we respond with the Creed and Prayers of the Faithful. The latter is one important place in the Mass where the priestly people offer intercession for the living and the dead. This is a moment that has been returned to the faithful by the liturgical renewal of Vatican II.

### *c) The Liturgy of the Eucharist.*

In order to look at this most important part of the eucharistic celebration, the following framework may be helpful. First the bread and wine are presented, taken and placed on the altar; second, the presider gives thanks to God for his saving works, calling upon the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine; third, the one Bread is broken; fourth, the transformed bread and cup are distributed. This fourfold action can be summarized as: "take, bless, break, share" (Dix, *The Shape of Liturgy*, pp. 48 ff.).

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### i) "Take"

The liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the presentation of the gifts and the preparation of the altar and gifts. After a basic preparation of the altar, the Lord's table, "the gifts are then brought forward. It is desirable for the faithful to present the bread and wine, which are accepted by the priest or deacon at a convenient place. The gifts are placed on the altar to the accompaniment of the prescribed texts. Even though the faithful no longer bring the bread and wine for the Liturgy from their homes, the rite of presenting the gifts retains the same spiritual value and meaning. This is also the time to receive money or gifts for the church or the poor brought by the faithful or collected at the Mass. These are to be put in a suitable place but not on the altar" (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, # 49). Note here how the full meaning of the presentation of the gifts derives from a time when the people themselves made the bread and wine. The offered gifts thus represent the labour of our own lives and give a visible expression to our intention to exercise our baptismal priesthood by offering ourselves in worship to the Father - not here, but during the eucharistic prayer which will follow. We also express our service of the Church and the poor by our gifts of bread, wine, and money yet, as we noted, all of this is a preparation for what is to follow.

### ii) "Bless"

"Now the center and summit of the entire celebration begins: the eucharistic prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanks; he unites them with himself in the prayer he addresses in their name to the Father through Jesus Christ. The meaning of the prayer is that the entire congregation joins itself to Christ in acknowledging the great things God has done and in offering the sacrifice" (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, #54)

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We see that the eucharistic prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving (the meaning of the term "eucharist".) In the Eucharist we are able to give praise and thanks to our Father because Jesus unites us to himself and joins our prayers to his. Thus the first sense of "bless" is not focused on the elements, but on the praise of God for his saving works and gifts. (For another example of this use of the term, recall at the preparation of the gifts: "Blessed are you Lord God of all creation ... Blessed be God forever!") Now since this prayer is an act of "thanksgiving" for the saving actions of God, "the Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passover (through Passion and Death to Resurrection and Ascension), the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body" (*Catechism*, # 1362). This prayer is one of "sanctification". First of all, it is through the praying of the eucharistic prayer that the bread and wine are "blessed" — that is, sanctified and consecrated through the Word of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit (*Catechism*, # 1375). Herein, the final and ultimate way in which Christ is present emerges in the celebration: his Presence in the sacramental elements of the Eucharist (*Catechism*, # 1374).

Yet sanctification goes even further. As the Holy Spirit is invoked on the bread and wine, so the Spirit is called down upon us the Church, so that we who are fed by the Lord at his paschal banquet will become ever more what we are - Christ's Body the Church.

Finally, the prayer is intercessory. In uniting itself to the offering of the Lord, the Church also unites itself to his intercession with the Father for all the living and for the faithful departed who are not yet fully purified. Thus we make intercession during the eucharistic prayer for the Pope, the Bishops, the whole Church, and all peoples, living and dead.

It must be said at the outset that the bishop or presbyter (ordained priest) is a member of the assembly who has a unique and essential sacramental role in the celebration of the eucharist. He conveys one of the modes of Christ's presence. In the light of the sacrament of Holy Orders and its connection to the apostolic ministry through the ages, his priestly ministry is necessary for the eucharistic offering; the Holy Spirit works through the priest's sacramental ministry to bring about the consecration of the bread and wine. Finally, the bishop or priest carries out the functions of presiding.

All of this being said, "in describing (the priest's) role as 'presiding', the *General Instruction* and the *Order of Mass* make it clear the liturgy is not his private function. Nor can the priest as presider be considered the only instrument of Christ's activity. Rather, all the members baptized and confirmed in Christ through the charisms of the Holy Spirit are the instruments of Christ's activity in the eucharistic celebration" (James Challancin. "The Whole Local Community Celebrates", p. 473). Thus, Jesus Christ "associates them intimately with his life and mission and also has given them a share in his priestly office of offering spiritual worship, so that God may be glorified and human beings saved .... For all their works, if done in the Spirit, become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ: their prayers and apostolic works, their married and family life, their daily work, their mental and physical recreation, and even life's troubles if they are patiently borne" (*Lumen Gentium* # 34). It is then that the active role of the baptized in the eucharistic prayer becomes most apparent.

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The passage continues, "In the eucharistic celebration these are offered with very great piety to the Father along with the offering of the body of the Lord. In this way the laity too, as worshippers carrying out their holy activity everywhere, consecrate the world itself to God" (*Lumen Gentium* # 34).

Another document puts this more forcefully: "in the celebration of Mass the faithful are a holy people, a people God has made his own, a royal priesthood: they give thanks to the Father and offer the victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him and learn to offer themselves. They should endeavour to make this clear by their deep sense of reverence for God and their charity toward all who share with them in the celebration" (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* # 62).

Put another way; the People of God bring their own living out of, and participation in, the Paschal Mystery — they bring their own many experiences of "dying" (to self) and "rising" (in Christ) — and in a most vivid manner unite them to the Paschal Mystery of the Lord made sacramentally present in the eucharistic action.

What is to be emphasized here is the active role which the whole baptized assembly has in the offering of the eucharistic prayer. While it is true that most of the prayer is verbalized only by the priest, he "addresses these prayers to God in the name of the entire holy people and all present" (*General Instruction* # 10). The acclamations of the eucharistic prayer are very important tangible expressions of the people's participation in the whole prayer.

Why does this active role of the assembly need to be emphasized? We have emerged from a period when the unique role of the priest was so emphasized that the offering of the eucharistic sacrifice was seen more as a spectacle to be watched with devotion than a prayer of thanksgiving which all participated in according to their offices. Many people saw this as a relatively "passive" part of the Mass, rather than an active joining in the offering of the prayer, albeit for the most part in silence. In other words, some saw the eucharistic prayer as an action exclusively of the priest, to be "watched" by the laity with sentiments of devotion. The result was at times a popular impression that the people's active participation in the liturgy of the eucharist was largely limited to the presentation of the gifts and to communion, good and necessary as these were. Rather, it can be asserted that just as the ordained priesthood reaches its most concentrated exercise during the eucharistic offering, so too, in its own way, the baptismal priesthood does as well.

The first two movements of the eucharistic action — *take* and *bless* — are continuous with and lead to the second two — *break* and *share* — which are essential elements of the Communion Rite of the Mass. Thus, "the Mass is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood ..." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1382).

### (iii) "Break"

After the people's affirmation of the eucharistic prayer with the Great Amen, the various texts and actions of the Communion Rite follow. "Since the eucharistic celebration is

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the paschal meal, it is right that the faithful who are properly disposed receive the Lord's body and blood as spiritual food as he commanded. This is the purpose of the breaking of the bread and the other preparatory rites that lead directly to the communion of the people" (*General Instruction*, # 56). Notice how, among all the elements of preparation for communion, the breaking of the bread stands out: "in apostolic times this gesture of Christ at the last supper gave the entire eucharistic action its name. This rite is not simply functional, but it is a sign that in sharing in the one bread of life which is Christ we who are many are made one body (see 1 Cor. 10: 17)" (*General Instruction*, # 56c).

### iv) "Share"

The action of communion — the sharing of the consecrated bread and wine among presider and assembly—is the culmination of the whole eucharistic action. The continuity between the eucharistic prayer and the communion is very important, and often neglected. The communion sacramentally expresses, confirms, and "seals" our participation in the eucharistic prayer — our entry into the Paschal Mystery; our celebration of the New Covenant, our self-giving to the Father, and our self-awareness and reality as the Church, the Body of Christ. (Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Living Faith*, p. 109). Therefore, "It is most desirable that the faithful receive the Lord's body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the instances where it is permitted, they share in the chalice. Then, even through the signs, communion will stand out more clearly as a sharing in the sacrifice actually being celebrated" (*General Instruction*, # 56h). "To receive communion is to receive Christ himself who has offered himself for us..." (*Catechism* # 1382). Because there is "one Bread" and "one Body", we express and deepen our union with each other in the very partaking in this most special time of union with the Lord. Thus, in the communion we participate in an action that is fundamentally communal (though it is too often experienced as a strictly individualistic moment).

### d) *We Are Sent Forth: The Concluding Rite*

Finally; the blessing and dismissal "sends each member back to doing good works, while praising and blessing "the Lord" (*General Instruction*, # 57b). The dismissal, while very brief in form, is extremely important. The people of God are sent forth to imitate what they have just celebrated: the pattern of the Paschal Mystery; and hence the Lord's example of self-giving in the service of others. Nourished at the Lord's Table, they go forth to live out who they are as members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

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### **Donations Given for Particular Intentions to be Offered at Mass**

#### **A Historical Glance at “Mass Offerings”:**

We can ask the question: "Was there anything akin to the Mass Offering as we know it today in the early centuries of the Christian Church?" The answer is Yes. The early Christian community's eucharistic celebrations involved special intercessions. Those who made offerings in the early days of Christianity provided material elements for the occasion, and donations were often made to the one who presided.

From the seventh century onward, the offering of money became increasingly more common, and the offering of bread and wine was discontinued. At this time too, the actual preparation and baking of the altar bread was placed more and more into the hands of religious and those in monasteries. With this development, the people's role was curtailed further in preparing and presenting the material provisions for the eucharistic meal. In the actual celebration of the Eucharist, the presentation of bread and wine by the people took place only on a very small number of occasions, and when practiced, had little more than dramatic value.

It was against this backdrop that the practice of the Mass Stipend had begun to emerge from the eighth century onwards. The particular meaning of the Mass Stipend at this point was that it served as a land of honorarium paid in advance to obligate a priest to celebrate mass exclusively for the intention of the donor. It was therefore a donation given outside the celebration of the Eucharist, for the purpose of obtaining a special benefit available in the mass, through the mediation of the priest.

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With the growing number of mass offerings given, there was a great increase in the number of priests whose sole duty was the celebration of Masses to fulfill the numerous requests. In this way; the practice of "private masses", and the principle that the giving of a stipend was effective even without the physical presence of the donor, became increasingly common. The practical understanding of the eucharist was growing further and further away from its context of the family of the Church gathering together in prayer. In effect, the eucharist could now be transacted from beginning to end without the participation of the people. In this exclusive and restrictive eucharistic practice, the Mass Stipend system became virtually the only ritual means for the people to gain access to the most cherished graces of the eucharistic banquet. As time went on, then, the offering of gifts was no longer a symbol of participation (as was the presentation of gifts in the celebrations of the early Christian communities), but rather the giving of gifts became a symbol of access.

### **Mass Offerings Within a Renewed Context:**

In distinction from the gifts that are brought to the altar during the celebration, the term Mass Offerings has meant money given to a priest in advance to celebrate the Eucharist for the intention of the giver.

In the renewed context, the intentional giving of ourselves in the Eucharist, is made visible through the gifts of bread and wine, and monetary offerings. All our intentions are lifted up and embraced by God. The focus is less on our intentions and more on what God is doing for us in the liturgy: Throughout the liturgy there are moments of quiet when we make our personal prayer before God. What, is in our hearts is heard by God whether we purposely offer money for the celebration or not.

In Canadian society contributions are seen as tangible signs of support for persons bereaved, for the dead, the sick, those for whom we extend special care or congratulations. Monetary offerings are best regarded as donations given in memory, or in tribute, as well as for the support of the Church and the poor (cf. *National Bulletin on Liturgy*, No. 84, 1982).

In our own Diocese, money that is given as an offering for the celebration of mass is distributed to the chosen charities of the presider, to the mission lands throughout the world, and to the ongoing care for sick priests. The intention which is brought forward by the donor of this offering, is carried along with all the intentions in the minds and hearts of those who celebrate the Eucharist. All who gather, and all the intentions that they bring to the celebration, are drawn by Christ into his death and rising for the glory of the Father. By the gifts given, in union with the prayers prayed, the community works together for the transformation of the family of the world.

### **Trends leading to our Current Understanding of Mass Offerings:**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (# 1368) speaks powerfully of the meaning of the Eucharist in our daily lives, and of our relationship to this sacrificial offering:

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The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all people. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering.

In the further development of the Mass Offerings from the eighth to tenth centuries, the goods and monies that previously had been given for the use of the Church, were gradually drawn into the liturgical action and joined to the offering of the Eucharist. These common offerings, which were very abundant, served many purposes: providing for the elements for the sacrifice, the maintenance of all that pertained to the worship action, the sustenance of the priests, and the support of Christ's poor. By their offerings, the faithful once again showed a sign of their participation in the sacrifice of praise offered to God, and at the same time they expected to share in a special way in the fruits of the celebration.

The donors of the offerings should see themselves as following the tradition of the early Christians who brought their gifts to the altar during the liturgical celebration. Their intentions or petitions are joined to the offering of Christ to the Father, and they participate in the benefits of the Mass according to their own measure of faith.

### **Why make Offerings for Particular Intentions?**

Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, Jesus acts in his Body the Church, and the perfect and unrepeatable offering of himself to the Father is made sacramentally present anew. In a particular way it is during our praying of the eucharistic prayer that Christ draws us into his saving passage from death to resurrected life in glory. In turn, our covenantal relationship with God is sealed by our participation in Holy Communion. The celebration of the Eucharist is therefore the greatest means by which the Lord shares the saving power of his Paschal Mystery with people of every time and place. Our benefit from this marvellous and infinite gift of passage is limited only by our dispositions and our capacity to receive it.

When we raise particular intentions to the Father in union with Jesus' own self-offering, we ask that the saving presence of the Lord, and thus a share of the saving grace of the Paschal mystery; be with those for whom we pray. Since the saving presence of the Lord and the power of his Paschal Mystery are eternal and without limit, there is no reason to fear that they can be somehow "all used up", or that one person can be disadvantaged by another person's abundant share.

The celebration of the Eucharist is primarily the priestly action of Jesus for us, and the response of his people, whom he has called together in worship. It should be clear that the private advantage of any individual or group of individuals can never be the whole or primary reason for celebrating the Eucharist. Rather, when Mass is celebrated, we pray for the Church, for those in authority, for those in particular need, for all people, for those present, for those departed, for the salvation of the whole world, and then for our intentions. Clearly; there is no sense in which this is "my" Mass (offered for my intention alone.)

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Similarly; a person has not somehow "cornered" a substantial share of the Lord's grace made present at Mass by giving a Mass stipend, nor is the giving of a stipend a better and more beneficial way of participating in the celebration of Mass than actual attendance at Mass. The offering of a stipend is merely the beginning of one's participation in the sacrifice. Where possible, it should be completed by full participation in the celebration at which one's gift is offered to God.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of our lives. It is a prayer that is offered to God not only by the priest acting in the name of the congregation, but by the congregation and priest (the whole assembly) acting together. The Second Vatican Council strongly re-emphasized the priestly right of all Christians to bring their gifts to the altar, thereby participating in a special way in the Eucharist: It may be helpful, therefore, to understand Mass intentions as petitions which the whole assembly; priest and people, unite with the Church's offering of Christ to the Father.

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### **Opportunities within the Mass to Make Prayers of Intercession**

The Eucharistic celebration is a prayer of thanksgiving. Throughout the celebration of the Eucharist, many opportunities exist for prayers of thanksgiving and petition.

#### **Introductory Rites:**

In the Introductory Rites of the mass, the Opening Prayer (or "collect") is an opportunity for the people to offer petitions. This is to be done in the silence that follows the invitation to prayer. We are to offer our own individual prayers, gathered together into the Opening Prayer.

#### **Liturgy of the Word:**

During the General Intercessions (or "prayers of the faithful"), the People of God exercise their priestly function when they offer prayers for all people. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says: "It is appropriate that this prayer be included in all masses with a congregation, so that intercessions may be made for the Church, for civil authorities, for those oppressed by various needs, for all mankind, and for the salvation of the world" (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, No. 45).

#### **Liturgy of the Eucharist:**

The Eucharistic Prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. In the Introductory Dialogue of this Prayer, the people are invited to lift their hearts and minds to God in thanks and praise. In the Preface, the people praise the Father and thank him for the work of salvation. During the Eucharistic Prayer, the intercessory portion reminds us that the celebration is made for the whole Church and for all its members, living and dead. This prayer of petition reminds us that we all share in the salvation acquired in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Lord's Prayer is a prayer of petition for many needs. We pray that God will give us our daily food, which for Christians is the Eucharist, food for our spiritual journey. During the Lord's Prayer we also petition God for forgiveness from sin and deliverance from evil.

In the Rite of Peace, we express love for one another and ask God for unity and peace in our world.

In the Prayer after Communion, the presider once again voices our petition to God that those present may receive the blessings and "effects" of the Eucharist just celebrated. The people by their "Amen" give their assent to this prayer.

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### Some Practical Concerns

In light of the theology and practice explained above, the policies within our Diocese regarding the celebration of Eucharist are as follows:

- The Sunday celebration of Eucharist in our parishes is the high-point of the parish family's life of faith. We emphasize that ALL Sunday masses, in all our parishes, are to be offered for all the people. There are therefore to be NO special mass intentions at these Sunday celebrations of Eucharist.
- After a lengthy process of consultation with those in ministry in each of the seven Deaneries of our Diocese, it was decided that the Suggested Mass Offering be kept at \$5 per mass. By keeping this amount, it will not be burdensome for people to request their intentions to be offered at Eucharist.
- The suggested amount for a mass offering is not a "fee" or a "price" for an intention to be brought to God. It is a donation for the care of the poor and for the care of priests who are ill. Because it is a donation, anyone who cannot afford this suggested amount of \$5 is still very welcome and able to have their intentions remembered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Those who do not have the means to give this donation are in no way restricted in requesting mass intentions.
- Monetary offerings for Mass intentions are not deposited in the general parish account, and so are not extra parish incomes. The offering given for one intention at Mass is given to the presiding priest (if he chooses to accept it) and his personal charities. If more than one intention is offered at Mass, the offerings given for the second and third intention are sent to the Diocese to care for needs such as the ongoing education of priests, and the care of priests who are ill. When a parish has too many intentions to be able to fulfill them in a reasonable time (i.e., one year), these intentions and the funds that go with them are sent to parishes without sufficient intentions, to retired priests, or to the missions. This distribution of intentions and their corresponding offerings is coordinated by the Diocesan Chancery Office. The priests who receive these intentions pray for them at the Masses at which they preside, and their work is supported by the accompanying donations. If a parish has an abundance of Mass requests for an individual intention, then some of these can also be distributed by the Chancery Office as indicated above.

Finally; keeping in mind what was said earlier, the Eucharist is not celebrated only for those few persons whose names are audibly mentioned during the celebration. The Eucharist, rather, is celebrated for all those who are present, gathered together around the Table of the Lord in worship. It is our God who gathers us up into the death, resurrection, and glory of the Lord for the transformation of the world.

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### **In Conclusion**

Historically; stipends connected the faithful to the celebration of Mass when their actual participation was limited. As we come to understand the meaning of Mass Offerings in our own era, we need to keep constantly before us the link between the gifts given outside of mass for the celebration of the eucharist, and the gifts that are presented within the liturgy. We need to remember that the mass offering only has meaning in connection with the actual celebration of mass. This realization challenges us in our future thinking and practice of making offerings for the celebration of Eucharist.

It is our hope that this pamphlet has been both helpful in bringing you to a deeper awareness of the meaning of Mass Offerings, and also inspirational, in strengthening your appreciation and understanding of the Eucharist which is the "source and summit of our Christian lives."

This pamphlet was written by:

Sr. Loretta Manzara, Office of Liturgy, Diocese of London

Fr. Louis Ouellette, St. John Vianney Parish, Windsor

Fr. John Pirt, Our Lady Help of Christians, Wallaceburg

Fr. Dan Vere, St. Philip's Parish, Petrolia

Fr. Bob Wilson, St. Joseph's Parish, London

Fr. Steve Wlusek (Editor), Sacred Heart / Immaculate Conception

Parish cluster, Windsor

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