

How much is a church wedding?

This question often comes up as engaged couples plunge into the rollercoaster ride of wedding preparations. I interpret the question as a request for clarification and not a complaint, although it does happen that some people do complain about almost any fee associated with church services. Usually this happens because their sense of belonging to the Church is not particularly strong, or because they don't know how to justly value the services they are receiving from the Church.

What I remember from my time as pastor at Becket is that in the guidelines we offered engaged couples we asked them to let their offering reflect the importance they are placing on what it is that the Lord is giving them and to also reflect their willingness to value the services they are receiving from the Church, like the number of interviews with a priest (hospital chaplains earn as much as \$35/hour), the use of the facilities, the liturgy itself, the fee to the archdiocese, the fee to the altar servers, and so on. There is usually a separate arrangement with those who provide the music and singing; since there are scales for artists' fees.

The amount of the offering to the Church has little to do with how much we have but a lot to do with how much we value the presence of the Lord in our lives. That's why what's best is not a fixed amount but a dynamic one, and why we usually try to offer guidelines for the couple's decision. At Becket, in 2006 the suggested offering was 5% or \$300 to \$500: 5% would be a clear signal of a generous intention to honor the Lord, while \$300 to \$500 would be a good place to start, keeping in mind what the couple are spending on the rest of the wedding day and preparations.

So if a couple will be spending \$20,000, 5% would be \$1000. If they'll be spending \$15,000, it would be \$750, and if \$40,000, that would be \$2000. It is not unusual for couples and/or their families to spend \$50,000 or more for a wedding, including all the elements such as invitations, dresses and suits, flowers and other accessories, video and or pictures, the cocktails and banquet, entertainment, and the honeymoon. I think it is very important to remember that, while wonderful, all these material elements which make up the event of a wedding day – with its preparations and aftermath – the entire happy event will last a day, a week, and perhaps longer, but cannot avoid becoming only a memory; however precious. The material details of the wedding day are only things that will fade or just continue to exist as mementos to the event, but as such cannot grow and have more life.

On the other hand, what a couple receive from the Lord will be a living gift of a special relationship with Him as a couple, and this is a truly living gift that will not diminish or fade but prosper and grow as they attend to it and nourish it. So doesn't it make sense for the couple to try to express even in what they spend the value of what it is that they are receiving? The process of discerning how much to give the parish in honor of the Lord for the preparation for their marriage received from the parish is really an occasion to have a reality check on the place the Lord and his Church have in their lives and perhaps to help them see whether they are in need of an update or upgrade. The amount they decide to set as a wedding offering for the parish in order to honor the Lord for the gift of their marriage is really up to them both.

I suggest that they discuss this response, then each pray about it and ask the Lord to bring his own light and clarity to their hearts, and then discuss together what they came up with over the day or two that they were praying about it. Then they can simply agree on an amount that would express their gratitude and attachment to the Lord and would honor Him the day of their wedding and the rest of their lives.

I hope these thoughts address the questions you the reader have in mind and help you in your decision. If I missed the point of the questions you have in your own mind, feel free to get in touch with me with a specific question and I'll do my best to respond to it to your entire satisfaction. God bless you and your family.