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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Prices for Church Rites in Russia Have Risen Nearly 40% Since Start of Ukraine War

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A Russian Orthodox priest performs a baptism. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

Suggested donations for baptisms, weddings and funerals in Russian Orthodox churches have risen by nearly 40% since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, The Moscow Times' Russian service reported.

A review of official websites and archived versions of 140 churches and monasteries across 70 regions and occupied Ukrainian territories found that recommended donations for religious rites have about two-thirds of Orthodox Church institutions since 2020.

Nineteen regions and republics, mostly those with predominantly Muslim populations, had no accessible Orthodox Church websites and were not included.

Some of the steepest increases were recorded at individual monasteries. A convent in Kaluga saw donation levels climb 345%, the biggest jump in the sample.

Recommended payments more than doubled at the Perm region's Epiphany Monastery.

And donations rose 192% at the 17th-century Svyato-Pokrovsky Convent, one of the oldest monastic communities in the Urals.

Seven churches that did not publish donation guidelines before the war now list them.

The most in-demand rites have seen the fastest growth.

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Average suggested donations for baptisms rose about 50%, wedding ceremonies doubled and funeral rites increased 71%.

Recommended payments for one-off services such as prayer services, memorial services or submitting names for commemoration climbed almost 56%.

Donations for the *sorokoust*, a series of 40 daily liturgies in remembrance of the dead, rose 47%.

The highest single fee identified was a 50,000-ruble ($640) donation for "eternal commemoration" at the Umyleniye Convent in the Khanty-Mansi autonomous district.

The monastery did not list this rite in the pre-war year of 2021, but comparable services from before the war averaged around 10,000 rubles ($128).

Andrei Kordochkin, a priest and former cleric of the Russian Orthodox Church's Spanish-Portuguese diocese, said prices are typically driven by diocesan directives rather than by local clergy.

Churches must send a portion of their income to the diocese, and these payments regularly increase, he said.

"If someone refuses to participate in this system or says they can't afford it, they risk losing their parish," he said. "When expenses rise, many priests see no alternative but to raise their income."

Kordochkin added that broader economic factors are also at play.

Inflation and rising utility costs, which churches must pay like any other organization, have contributed to the price hikes.

According to state statistics agency Rosstat, cumulative inflation since 2022 has exceeded 30%.

Residents of the Chelyabinsk region city of Kopeysk complained in October that the cost of candles, services and baptisms had nearly doubled in a year.

The fee for submitting a single name for yearlong prayers had risen from 100 to 5,000 rubles ($1.20 to $64), one Kopeysk resident said.

The local priest said prices were set at the diocesan level and were uniform across the region.

The Chelyabinsk diocese said churches rely on donations to cover basic expenses and maintain facilities.

Although some dioceses warn parishioners in advance about planned increases, complaints about rising church prices regularly appear on social media.

In September, a priest in Irkutsk proposed replacing individual service fees with a mandatory tithe. Senior Church officials quickly dismissed this suggestion, stressing that the priest was not authorized to speak on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church.

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