

FROM THE PASTOR'S



33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – November 18, 2007 C

COMMENTS ON OUR ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT AND BUDGET

Most, if not all pastors in Florida wait until November to issue a parish financial report when our six month winter parishioners have returned to us. You will find a copy of this year's Financial Report on page four of this bulletin. Now for some comments.

1. I am **most grateful** to all of you who year after year support our parish financially. Your generosity helps us to fund our many ministries and to maintain our wonderful facilities - all eight of them. See page five of bulletin for levels of giving to our offertory.

2. I try very hard to be a **good and responsible steward** of the donations you give.

While I very much appreciate the ministry of *all* of our volunteers, the ministry and volunteer hours of some parishioners does save the parish a significant amount of money each year. Most, if not all parishes our size (3,500 families) have a full time Parish Manager/Administrator. Since I came here six years ago we have gotten along without a parish manager. This has saved the parish \$600,000 +. We have been able to do this through the combined work of our bookkeeper, Mary Russo and the volunteer work of Dick Cross and Don Foy, who have acted as Project Managers of our *Faith In Our Future* campaign projects and other projects - e.g. when our facilities were damaged by hurricanes. I also continue to be most grateful for the work of Lee Dague and John Brewer. Both these men do a bunch of maintenance work in our parish every week.

Other ministries in our parish are also often coordinated by paid employees in other parishes e.g. Ministry to the Sick (Pat Apfelthaler) Thrift Store (Bob Costello, Tom Knutson, and Richard Kurtz), Social Concerns (Maryanne Gilboard). I am most grateful for the above named individuals. Getting by without a full time associate pastor is also a savings to the parish.

Parish Tithe: You will notice from our report that we continue to share a percentage of our offertory (this year 7%) with the poor. In August I shared with you the recipients of our tithe money. It has been rightly said that our budgets (personal and parish) are a theological statement - they state concretely what is really important in our lives. We can *say* that the needs of the poor are important to us, but if they never make it into our budgets then our *actions* betrays our words. Even though I feel very stretched to set aside so much money for the poor, I do it because I know it is the right thing to do. Without a serious outreach to the poor, we would be a self-serving institution.

The School: In the past fiscal year, 2006-2007, and the current fiscal year—financing the school has become a huge challenge. The size of the challenge can be briefly stated in this way: in the spring of 2006 (when tuition rates are set for the coming school year), we budgeted \$112,000 in tuition aid to the school. Our *actual* aid turned out to be \$380,000, a whopping \$280,000 over budget! The huge deficit was caused by a significant drop in enrollment—a reality experienced by nearly all of the Catholic schools in Brevard. In 2005, we had 627 students enrolled in our school. We started this school year with 481 students. We now have 486.

This year, we have budgeted \$256,000 in financial aid to the school, to cover operating costs. We expect that this figure will be pretty accurate because we waited until *September* to refine this piece of the budget. In September, we actually know the number of children in our school and we know the amount of tuition aid that we will need to give. It is important to state, that whether we have 35 students in a classroom, or whether we have 25 students in a classroom, the personnel, facilities and other general costs of operating the school, are the same. Also, whether we give \$10,000 in tuition aid or \$113,000 (this current year) our general operating costs are the same.

If it were not for the gift of a generous Will bequest, received two years ago, the above increases to our school would have wiped out our reserves, or cut, very significantly into our School Endowment fund. Without such generous and selfless gifts, Catholic education might not be possible for many of our students! Considering this fact, we ask that you please consider including your parish or school endowment in your Last Will and Testament.

Finally, the parish's financial aid to the school this year would be about \$90,000 higher if it were not for the combined donations of our new school envelope contributions and the highly successful Casino Night. How are we going to deal with the financial challenge that our school faces in the coming year? Our school finance committee is studying various options. As for myself, I believe the solution is a threefold approach: a) increase tuition significantly. Our tuition costs are significantly lower than several schools in the Diocese. b) add more successful fundraisers e.g. an Annual Appeal, and a Parish Festival. c) appeal to all of you, who believe in the value of Catholic Education, to go the extra mile for our parish. When all of us in a parish this size decide to pitch in, I feel very confident that we can rise to the challenge and help our school continue its wonderful ministry of forming, with a good Catholic education, the future leaders of our church and society.

Increase in Operational Expenses and Liability

Notice that our budgeted operational expenses are up 16% and our Liability Insurance has increased 20%. With a campus of eight facilities, most of which are 20+ years old, we always build into this line item money for unforeseen expenses.

Some Reflections on the Spirituality of Money.

1. The way we manage and spend our money is a spirituality matter—for the spiritual life has to do with every aspect of our lives and not just with those times when we pray or are in church. Because the issue of our finances is a very personal matter, we usually do not talk to others about it—not even to God. Recently, I read a book on a biblical approach to finances called *Your Money Counts*.

In the book, the author, Howard Dayton, tells the following story.

2. *Being faithful in small matters counts*. Luke 16:10 states: “He who is faithful or trustworthy in small matters will be faithful in great matters.” How do we know if a teenager is going to take care of his first car? Observe how he took care of his bicycle. Someone has said: “Small things are small things, but faithfulness with small things is a big thing.” People say that they would give a lot of money away if they had a million dollars. This probably is not true if they are not generous with what they presently have.

Practical Suggestions for Action

1. If you live on a low fixed income, do consider giving something to our offertory collection even if it is a dollar a week. Just as Jesus praised the poor widow for her pennies to the collection, he will praise you.
2. Seek to be an ‘intentional or percentage giver’ to your parish. In other words, move beyond the practice of ‘loose change giving’. I invite all of you to ‘do the math’ and prayerfully decide what percentage of your weekly, monthly or yearly income you want to give your parish family. (See chart on page five of this bulletin). The giving practices of people with an unstable income will obviously fluctuate according to what they make in a given month.
3. If you are presently an ‘intentional or percentage giver’ continue to edge towards the biblical ideal of 10% or more—5% to one’s parish and 5% to the poor if you have not already reached this goal. For biblical references to tithing see Genesis 14:18-20 and Malachi 3:7-10.
4. If you presently do not utilize the new *school envelope* in your monthly package and are in a position to do so, consider helping us out. As you can see from the above, we really need all the help you can give.
5. If you presently have the practice of giving monthly, consider giving weekly (even if three envelopes are empty). Why? It sets a good example for those around you. In

church our behavior is *contagious* be it in the area of singing, praying, hospitality or placing a donation in the basket. Whether we realize it or not we do set a good example for those around us when they see us place our envelope in the basket. That is why I publicly give my offering at Mass. I too wish to be one of those who set a good example.

6. If you do not receive the monthly envelope package and would like to do so, please contact Flo at the parish office 254-1595 ext. 3050, fdowney@ascensioncatholicsch.org. Information on Electronic Giving on page five of bulletin.

7. If you presently receive the monthly package and hardly ever use them, please contact Flo at the parish office so that we do not continue having the expense of mailing envelopes to parishioners who do not use them.

8. If you don’t financially support your parish family and are in a position to do so or only give loose change when you could be much more generous, you should experience what is called *healthy guilt*—the guilt we ought to feel for failing to do what we ought to do.

9. I read the following recently: “When you give cheerfully, it is an act of worship. When you give begrudgingly it is not.” But please know that this Pastor will cheerfully accept and appreciate all donations those given cheerfully and those given the begrudgingly.

Again a big **Thank You** to all who support our parish financially.

If you have any questions or comments on our Financial Report, please feel free to share them with myself, Mary Russo our parish bookkeeper email—mrusso@ascensioncatholicsch.org.

Have a blessed week,

