

Annual Catholic Appeal 2021

Since my arrival as pastor in 2015, St. Mary of the Lakes parishioners have always generously supported the Annual Catholic Appeal. Every year, at least since I've been here, SML has surpassed her goal. I too support the appeal. I have already made and increased my gift for this year.

One of the pastors of the Diocese and I had a conversation about the Annual Catholic Appeal, said he has come across the argument made by parishioners to just make a gift to the parish, rather than to the Diocesan appeal. This way, the parish would receive the entire gift, rather than just a percentage of their gift via parish rebate. My priest friend said he didn't know how to respond. Here's how I responded.

Let's begin with St. Paul. St. Paul. St. Paul writes about collection that was taken up by St. Paul from the Churches, and given to the Church in Jerusalem. So in a very real way, appeals for the benefit of the larger Church have been a part of the practice of the faith since the time of St. Paul.

St. Mary of the Lakes, and every other parish, I am quite sure, depends on the larger church, namely, diocesan support, at just about every turn.

Every priest, every deacon, every staff person, from business manager to the Director of Religious Education to Youth Minister to the school principal, receives educational and ministerial training either at the diocese, or on the diocesan dime.

In addition to staff support, ministerial support as well.

The:

- ✓ Finance Council
- ✓ Parish Pastoral Council
- ✓ School Board
- ✓ Religious Education (RE) Program
- ✓ Catechist Formation
- ✓ Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)
- ✓ Eucharistic Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC)
- ✓ Adult Faith Formation
- ✓ Pre Cana
- ✓ Respect Life Committee
- ✓ Bereavement Ministry
- ✓ Legion of Mary
- ✓ St. Vincent de Paul
- ✓ Ministers to the sick

All of these ministries here at St. Mary of the Lakes rely on the Diocese for their formation and further education.

If a parish did not make a gift to the diocesan appeal, it would be pharisaical to expect diocesan help. And by pharisaical, I refer to Matthew 23 which reads:

For they (the Pharisees) preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens (hard to carry) and lay them on people's shoulders, but do not lift a finger to move them.

In other words, if a parish turns to the diocese for help and support, especially as often as St. Mary of the Lakes does, and then does not help carry the load with financial support, that's pharisaical.

Three years ago, I spoke about how appreciative I was to the diocese in helping me to hire our former principal Amy Rash. It was an extensive process, and I was confident in my decision to hire Amy based on the diocesan protocols. Well, this past August, Amy resigned due to not being able to find child care during COVID. So time was of the essence and I knew I did not have time to go through the process again, of hiring a principal. So, relying on the Diocese, I worked one on one with our diocesan superintendent and was able to hire Maria Sobel, who has been a blessing to our school.

We're in the midst of a pandemic. And government relief for SML has come by way of the payroll protection plan, a rather extensive application. I'm very grateful to our business manager Susan Kraemer for completing the application twice, but she has been in very frequent contact with the diocesan finance office regarding how to make the application. Valuable, valuable help.

Part of the appeal also goes toward the education of seminarians. Praying I am not speaking prematurely, but a young man from SML is making application to the Diocese of Trenton to become a seminarian. His education will be paid for by the Diocese. I don't want to announce who he is until he is accepted by the Diocese but SML will be blessed to have a vocation from our parish!

So, on that happy note, I'll ask you to direct your attention to the video.

SHOW VIDEO. LIGHTS. SOUND SYSTEM.

Due to COVID, pledge forms are not available in the pews.

However, those who have made a gift to the ACA have received a letter or a postcard in the mail this past week. You can use the pledge form provided in the letter or the information on the postcard to make your pledge, or you may

take a pledge form that are in the return envelopes at the doors of the Church. I make my gift on line, which is very simple.

One final point. SML collections are at 92 percent. We are blest! Blest. We also have sufficient reserves to make up for this decrease. Other parishes are not so fortunate. Diocesan revenue is at 70 percent due and diocesan staff has been reduced by 15 percent due to COVID. Therefore the Diocese is relying on parishes like SML to be extra generous, because we can. So making a gift this year is paramount so the much needed and provided diocesan support to parishes can continue.

Thank you for your kind attention and for joining me in making a pledge to this year's Annual Catholic Appeal.