

*“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.” — St. Teresa of Avila*

This is the time of year when we work up our annual budget for the parish. Our fiscal year runs from July 1st through June 30th. In preparing this year's budget, we have run into some major obstacles to balance it. The first major hurdle is that our offertory, which in previous years has grown, remained flat, even though our membership numbers have climbed (We have had over 40 new families join us since Advent.) The second hurdle is, of course, the problems going on in the Church universal, especially centering around the second round of the abuse scandal in the Church, which has affected parishes far and wide, not just ours. The third major obstacle comes from our diocesan obligations, because our diocesan assessment (or “tax”, if you will), which helps to provide for the combined efforts of all our parishes and the ministry of the Bishop, has gone up substantially this year (11%). This was compounded by the fact that our offertory two years ago had increased, thus causing the actual assessable income to be more. Whereas we had anticipated a certain amount of growth in the offertory again this year, this did not materialize as much as we had hoped. This growth would have allowed us to remain balanced. And so we are not projecting growth in our 2019 budget. Over the past year, we did make substantial strides in reducing our actual costs. Therefore, we spent far less than the budgeted amount seen in the bulletin. This has caused many of our ministries to suffer, due to the austerity measures. However, these austerity measures and cutbacks are not going to be able to overcome the increase in diocesan assessments this coming year, which is shaping up to leave us with a \$75,000 deficit, which we are working hard to make up.

I bring this up now because if we don't address this issue, we will not be able to cut much more. The reality is that we have no control over the majority of our budget. Over 70% of our annual budget is fixed by the assessment to the diocese, priest costs established by the diocese, insurance, and utilities. With the remainder, we have to provide for the maintenance and upkeep of our facilities, pay our professional staff, and fund our many and growing ministries to the faithful. It should be noted that many of the people who perform the ministries at our parish do so on a volunteer basis or receive minimal compensation for their expenses and time. No one ever said you would get rich working for the Church! However, we run into a moral obligation to pay people who dedicate their full time to ministry in the Church a just wage and to be good stewards of our resources, including our beautiful but OLD buildings, which require so much more than just TLC. For that reason, the Church reminds us that we all have an obligation to assist with the material goods of the Church. We find in the Catechism the **fifth precept of the Church** (CCC §2043): *“You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.... The fifth precept means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability.”* We also find in the Code of Canon Law: Can. 222 §1. *“The Christian faithful are obliged to assist with the needs of the Church so that the Church has what is necessary for divine worship, for the works of the apostolate and of charity, and for the decent support of ministers.”*

This, then, is a serious obligation that falls upon each and every baptized Christian in his or her own way. I myself try to practice what I preach, and I have set up my own WeShare account and contribute back to the parish. But the reality is, there are many registered parishioners whom we are not able to recognize as regular contributors on a financial basis. Also, we also have lots more people in the pews than are registered as parishioners, meaning many more *potential* givers. Every little bit counts. Our Vision here at the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul is *“to be a parish of actively engaged, invested, and committed followers of Christ, living the fullness of the Catholic faith.”* Our hope is always to broaden the base of support by including EVERYONE, rather than just constantly asking for the FEW who consistently give to give more. For example, we have 845 active families registered, with 579 families giving in a recordable way. This is up from just two years ago, when we had only 366 families recorded as giving. It shows that we are increasing the base of support. However, we still have growth potential. There are still a considerable number of folks—who have perhaps never registered or have not given in the past—that we would like to activate to seek their investment in our mission. We also recognize that the majority of our contributors give less than \$5 a week to the parish (306 out of 579 families). Each year, we send out an IRS tax letter to households that contribute \$15 or more a week to the parish. Last year, we sent out about 190 letters. IF we were able to increase the number of households receiving this letter next year by 100, we will have been able to erase the deficit.

This is an unpopular topic to hear, and it is even more uncomfortable for me to preach about—but that seems to only be among us Catholics. Our Protestant brothers and sisters are somehow able to make tithing and the stewardship of money a much more central focus in their spirituality and church life—so much so, that Protestant churches with the equivalent number of members as a parish our size put us to shame with the amount of their offertory, providing huge budget for multi-media outreach, full-time youth pastors, and amazing and incredible facilities that span from exercise equipment to community centers to amazing charitable outreaches. Now, we have to be careful of being envious and perhaps noting that not all that glitters is gold. However, I do believe that we need to constantly evaluate our own relationship with the goods of this world, for the sake of our souls, and to heed the obligation to provide for the work of the Church and its continuance in our own community. To take up St. Teresa of Avila's famous prayer, quoted above, I would further it by saying: **God has no money in this world but yours.** How do we put a price or give a value to what happens here? It is priceless. It's infinite. This is the work of faith. It takes a finite amount of money and makes it into something infinite. We buy bread and wine and it becomes the Sacred Body and the Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

*The “good news” is, we have enough money. The “challenge news” is that it's in your pockets!*

*Rev. J. David Carter*