

Reprinted from the October 4, 2009 bulletin:

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

The parish *Finance Council* has been laboring over the last month to approve a responsible budget for the new fiscal year (2009-2010) and to come up with a realistic plan of action for meeting it. Faced with hard choices, an excellent suggestion at our meeting this past week: namely, through my pastor's column this weekend and my scheduled presentation of the parish financial report next weekend, as well as informal conversations with parishioners over the next two weeks, that we try to gather input from the parish as a whole regarding these challenging choices we face at the present time.

The current financial situation of St. Joseph Parish, very briefly summarized, is this: ever since our successful Giving Appeal four years ago which boosted our average weekly offertory collection to \$12,500, this amount has been maintained and even increased in small yearly increments, to its current level of approximately \$12,700 per week. We have put this money to work, by expanding the *pastoral services* offered in our parish (increasing the number of priests and deacons and re-opening our convent); by providing an additional \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually in cash and contributed services (over and above our mandatory contribution of \$60,000) to assist our *St. Joseph School*; and by attending to many of the deferred *capital maintenance* issues that our 100-year-old plant, with its seven buildings, so urgently require.

Last fiscal year our cash flow ended for the first time modestly in the red (apart from the planned capital expenses of completing the stained glass windows and the 30 Fairmont renovation). This year, at current contribution levels, the anticipated cash deficit will be even greater, because of major repair work that needed to be done this past spring and summer: namely, installing a code-compliant fire alarm and monitoring system for the church hall and pull-boxes in the upper church; completing desperately needed masonry repairs to the convent porch, the church sidewalks, and much of the school; and renovating the main lavatories that serve the upper-grade school and Holy Family Hall, plus the church men's room.

At this point our small parish savings (\$67,000 in general funds) cannot absorb the deficit of approximately \$50,000 that we anticipate for the 2009-2010 fiscal year. The options being debated on the finance council are the following:

- We could conduct *our usual "Recommitment Appeal,"* as we have for the last three years each November, and stress the importance of each family's giving to the best of their ability. Last year this approach resulted in a total yearly increase in offertory contributions of \$7,000, similar to the results for the previous years.
- We could participate in *a program currently being offered under the auspices of the Diocese of Bridgeport,* which provides a professionally prepared packet of parish mailings and brochures which, combined with talks at Mass, seeks to reach out to all our 2,100 parish families, explaining the need for everyone "chipping in," presenting a stream-lined way to utilize the new option of online giving (also known as *E.F.T., or Electronic Funds Transfer*), and appealing to those parishioners who are able to consider increasing their contributions by a few dollars a week. Last year 28 diocesan parishes took part in this program, and all of them increased their offertory contributions by solid amounts.
- We could organize *special parish fund drives* for specific capital repair projects. For example, we could sponsor a drive to cover the \$33,000 spent repairing the masonry and school lavatories this past summer. This approach, however, as pointed out at our last finance council meeting, would require special fund drives probably every year for the inevitable capital maintenance and repair needs that arise.
- Lastly, we could decide that in the current difficult economic times, it is not possible to seek any significant increase in new funds. In that case, we will need to *reduce the services provided by St. Joseph Parish* during the coming year. These "discretionary" services and expenses, so to speak, are, unfortunately, those which would substantially affect the quality of parish life here at St. Joseph's: such as maintaining a full complement of three priests, two deacons, and a convent with five sisters (three of whom work in the parish); providing the additional voluntary subsidy each year to St. Joseph School; and seeking to address the most urgent deferred maintenance issues each year, so that our parish's aged physical plant is kept in a safe and decent condition.

*Thank you for all your very generous, faithful support!
Please share your thoughts and feelings with us!*

- Monsignor Chris Walsh

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