

# 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – October 20/21, 2018 – Financial State of the Parishes

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When our Bishop appointed me Pastor to the parishes of Millbury and to Assumption School, he charged me with the spiritual care of souls in our communities and also with the temporal care of our finances and our properties. Each fall, members of our parishes' Finance Committee come before you to render an account of our stewardship. In the more than four years that I have been here, these reports have, for the most part, been upbeat, reflecting bills being paid, growth in numbers and ministries, past debt being paid down ... an overall solid financial picture. This year, the report is not quite so rosy which is why I felt it my responsibility to not so great news rather than foist that unpleasant task on FinCom members.

Let me put our last Fiscal Year in context. On a national level, the American economy seems to be perking right along. Jobless rates are at an all-time low. Salaries are, at last, slowly rising. The Stock Market has been riding the bull for the last several years. And, with low interest rates, building in the housing market and big ticket item purchases have all been trending up. I wonder though all the good economic news might just be something of a paper tiger. Recently, the Stock Market has been falling. Tariffs have been imposed to prop up flagging U.S. industries like steel, coal, and automobiles. The skilled workforce isn't being turned out by our schools. Long neglected infrastructure is crumbling and advances in transportation are

occurring at a glacial pace. Changing weather is costing more and more in lives and property. Iconic companies like Sears and Toys R Us and GE are declaring bankruptcy while fewer and fewer are watching the major TV networks. Even sports are feeling the downturn as the mighty giant, football is slipping slightly in viewership and attendance. Oh, and did I mention all of these problems are being dealt with by kicking the can down the road and adding more and more each year to the multi-trillion dollar national debt??! Who cares? We won't hafta pay it ... that'll be way in the future long after you and I are gone!

The situation in our Diocese of Worcester is much the same. For years, people in the parishes and in the Catholic schools have looked at the diocese as "Big Daddy" with bottomless pockets who would write off any debt, prop up any failing enterprise, fund any new ministry. I sit on the Diocesan Finance Committee, not because I'm some sort of financial expert but because I was concerned about the state of things as I saw them. We just had a budget meeting last week and I'm sad to say that we passed a budget for this current fiscal year that reflects an almost 3 million dollar DEFICIT. That kind of budgeting would be unsustainable in a very few short years.

Here at our parishes, the situation, I think reflects the national and the diocesan picture. First, we have fewer people participating in the life of the Church. At St. Brigid, ten years ago, almost 800 people worshipped on an average weekend. Last year, it was half that amount. As far as celebrating the sacraments goes, eight years ago, there were 41 Baptisms, 55 First Communions, and 38 Confirmations. Last year there were 16 Baptisms, 19 First Communions, and a handful of Confirmations. At Assumption, with a few blips, the picture has been trending downward for years. Sadly, at both of our parishes, the only

number that seems to be trending up would be the number of funerals, but that number going up means that more people are going up ... to heaven, that is ... and the number of souls onboard this side of the Pearly Gates is shrinking. So we need to face facts: we people of the Church are getting older and many many of our younger families are just not as committed to faith, Church, and supporting their parish. Just one statistic: of 123 Faith Formation families in our database, 73 of those families contribute zero dollars to the support of the Church. That means that more than 60 percent of our younger families contribute neither their presence nor their monies to our parishes.

So, in the face of slipping collections, declining numbers, and aging properties, what have we done? First, we have expanded our Finance Board so that I might benefit from the insight and experience of more eyes. Second, we have been in close contact with the Diocesan Finance Office and the Diocesan Schools Department about our school with its declining enrollment and mounting debt. Third, we have reluctantly passed deficit budgets for both parishes; about ten thousand in the red for Assumption and about twenty thousand for St. Brigid. Fourth, I have considered recommendations from members of our Finance Board and have spoken with our bookkeeper while imposing approximately fifteen thousand dollars in reductions to those deficit budgets that cut across most of our ministries and personnel ranging from the Pastor to Faith Formation to Music to Sr. Jean to our Bookkeeper to our Office expenses to Adult Education and RCIA to Fellowship. Fifth, with the help of our Finance Board, we will become part of the Sharing Our Blessings Offertory Enhancement Program sometime after the new year. Sixth, we will be adding a Special Collection, a Winter's

Woes/Winter Blessings outreach to help defray costs for plowing and snow removal on our campuses.

I am sorry to be the bearer of bad news to you, my friends, today. I feel that I have failed you in my pastoral responsibilities. I would only remind all of us that at the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus the Lord was left with small numbers, an empty purse, and a mountain of crosses and He rose from those ashes, and the Church grew, and the Gospel spread, and Saints watered the earth with their blood and sweat, which brought forth good and faithful Christians. Together, in the Holy Spirit, following the light of the Son, faithful to the Father, care-full of one another, we can do the same. I pray we can do the same!