

Father Black's "Report to the Parish" [*Homily from September 26 & 27, 2020*]

As you know, each year around this time, I give a report to our parish which covers not only the financial report that is submitted to the diocese, but also any significant events, achievements and challenges to our parish during the past fiscal year. I also take this opportunity to outline my goals for the future of our parish.

As I wrote these words, something struck me. So many aspects of our lives have been turned upside down since March of this year, yet the report is strikingly similar to previous ones. The "hows" and the "wheres" and the "whens" of parish life have all gone through tough changes and challenges, sometime multiple times. But the "what" of parish life remains: our mission of prayer, evangelization and service. Today, I would like to briefly review this past fiscal year with you and share some hopes for the months ahead.

I would like to begin with a genuine expression of gratitude. Recently people have asked how I'm dealing with all the protocols, rules and changing expectations. My response has become "Daily". As we have moved through what has proven to be a moving target when it comes to what we can and can't do, I am immensely grateful for our staff and parishioners. You have been patient, understanding and gracious in all that has been asked of you. May God bless you for all you have done and how you have been through all this.

In the bulletin [September 27, 2020], you will find 4 things:

The financial results of our income and expenses for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020.

Our budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021.

A summary of the larger Capital Projects.

A 2020 Stewardship Challenge that I hope will direct us in the months ahead.

I would like to talk about the first three items together, as they contain the bottom line numbers. Then I'll move forward to focus on future goals for our parish.

You will notice that we ended last year with \$35,000 in positive income and have budgeted next year at a \$53,000 positive income. Without a doubt, I am grateful to be able to report this to you. Who would have thought that we would come through this "in the black". However, this does not mean that we are free of challenges and there isn't work we have to do. In order to achieve these figures, like many of you, we've had to tighten our budget. We have had to eliminate some staff positions, postpone filling others and all of our staff have stepped up, taking on additional duties. We have worked hard at being fiscally responsible while maintaining effective ministries. It is only with these efforts and your generosity that we were able to finish the year in the black. It is our hope that as we move forward, we can be in a position to take another look at refilling some of these staff positions.

You will also notice that under income in next fiscal year's budget, we have our Payroll Protection Program. This money will only be available to us for this next fiscal year. So while our reports end in the positive, we still have an income challenge in front of us. Other than these "bottom line" figures, the only other report numbers that I would like to point out refer to our Expanding the Foundation Campaign. We are planning to assess the best way to restart this campaign once things have settled down. Many have asked about the funds that we have already received. You will see those funds reported as "Fund Drives" under income and associated expenses specific to the campaign are reflected in the expense category. For both last year and this year, income and expense associated with the fund drive are adjusted out of the bottom line for our operating budget. This allows us to show the income on our books, but keep the funds separate from other income.

With much consultation, discussion, and prayer (emphasis on the latter!), I have included a Stewardship Challenge to our report. This is a map for how I would like to move forward in the coming fiscal year. Like most of us, these times have forced us to evaluate many things, especially our priorities. While we will be creatively reflecting on a wide definition of parish stewardship, for now, I ask us to consider a two pronged approach to this challenge, offertory and discipleship.

As you will see in the report, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states that “As Christian stewards, we receive God’s gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord”.

This spirit of stewardship has long been a strength of our parish. While we face some financial challenges this year, I am confident that this same spirit will lead us forward. As stated above, one of our stewardship challenges will be to strengthen our offertory to the point that we are able to meet our future needs. I am asking you to consider an increase in your offertory commitment, if you haven’t already done so. As of Sept. 13, roughly the first quarter of our current fiscal year, our offertory has experienced an \$18,000 deficit. If this continues, the actual deficit will grow to \$85,000 by June of 2021. These months have highlighted the importance and convenience of setting up your offertory through direct deposit. I encourage all of you to consider this option. Clearly, this deficit is partly due to the decrease in weekly mass attendance. However, our attendance numbers are increasing. Last weekend we had more people attending mass than were here the first weekend after the lockdown. Just so you know, we are looking into providing overflow seating for our 9:30 mass in the social hall which will include the live-stream that goes out to those at home. This should be in place for next weekend (October 3/4)

The second prong of the 2020 Stewardship challenge is through Discipleship. It was clear from the first weekend we were unable to come together for Mass, that our parish wanted to continue our outreach to the poor. The generous food drops that occurred on those Sunday mornings when Mass was not an option were inspiring. This is when our own St. Teresa’s Outreach really stepped forward, kicked into action, and they haven’t stopped!! Thank you to all of our STO volunteers and to their leadership in Deacons Steve Petrill and Jim Rouse, soon to be deacon Jim Elchert and Angelita Salyers. We continue to receive food through our Monday morning food drops as well as a steady stream of food brought to our Narthex.

I am asking that our group fundraising focus on a specific plan that will allow us to best respond to the needs of the poor in these limiting times. I am very grateful for the support of our groups in this focus. We are entering into a season which usually has two of our biggest outreach efforts; the Thanksgiving food box drive and the Christmas giving tree. The organizations that receive these donations are themselves limited; particularly by not being able to gather the large groups to sort and distribute the goods to those in need. These collections will be done through on-line donations or a collection of gift cards.

So I direct you to the Sept. 27th bulletin for an outline of 4 specific areas in which you can participate in this important outreach. This is on the bottom of page 13 of the Sept. 27th bulletin. Please consult that information and plan for these upcoming outreach opportunities. I would like to share an old story about a little boy who came across a cocoon in his back yard. Noticing its movement, he took a closer look and discovered a small crack through which he could see the butterfly struggling inside. Partly out of wanting to help the butterfly and partly out of impatience he cracked the cocoon open. The butterfly quickly emerged, but soon struggled to move its wings, for they were too weak. You see, the normal process of breaking out of the cocoon is what builds up strength in the butterfly’s wings. The moral of the story is, our personal struggles, mixed with God’s grace, makes us strong.

I am confident that whatever struggles, losses or pains these times have brought us, will not go untouched by the very grace of God and give us strength and ultimately glory in His name. I would like to close by praying together for those who have suffered, or continue to suffer, and for an end to all that brings pain to our nation and to our world. Hail Mary...