

St. Theresa Church / Our Lady of the Wayside
Status of Parish Finances

Finance Committee Speech

To Parishioners

January 2015

I am Steve Watson, and I recently became Chair of the Finance Committee.

In today's bulletin, there is a summary of our most recent fiscal year along with a letter from Fr. John. You will see we have both good news and bad news.

As you know by now, we survived the most recent round of Archdiocesan parish mergers and closings. This is obviously good news and we are grateful. We do pray for those whose parishes have been closed. However, we must not become complacent. In order for us to maintain our independence, each of us is now called to do what we can to revitalize our parish.

Over the last 3 years, we depleted most of our savings and borrowed significantly from the Archdiocese to support our school. Yet our school was closed and as a result, we lost parishioners.

Our total collections have been down year, over year, over year for the past 7 years yet we are still responsible for 2 church buildings, a rectory and a former school – all in need of repair. As we saw recently with 2 boiler failures, our repairs are dealt with on an emergency basis. These repairs can be costly and cause considerable disruption to programs and to church attendance.

Aside from the physical plant, we have no funds to allocate for additional parish programs and are struggling to keep what we do have in place.

The good news is we can change all this. If we want St. Theresa to survive this era of consolidation declining vocations and increased secularization, we must take steps now to reverse the trend. We cannot wait until we are added to an "at risk" list by the Archdiocese. Hopefully, we learned that lesson from our school closing. We must act now.

We can accomplish meaningful change if through, prayerful consideration, we can honestly evaluate three questions.

First:

Am I giving what I can financially to support the parish?

Median household income in the U.S. is about the same among Protestants and Catholics, yet Protestants give more than twice as much as Catholics to their local congregations. We Catholics are accustomed to getting church basically for free because historically parishes were staffed by people who worked for free. Those days are gone. Catholic giving at the parish level needs to migrate to a percentage of income based giving. We can no longer afford to treat the collection basket as a tipping basket. We must embrace the spiritual benefits Christ teaches us about giving.

Second:

Can I overcome my resistance to electronic giving?

As we saw last weekend, a weather emergency can annihilate our weekly income. The 9AM mass at St. Theresa had not a single attendee. Overall, our collections were down 70%! While some parishioners do increase contributions to cover missed weeks, the vast majority do not. This is devastating financially. It makes budgeting extremely difficult and simply put, we cannot stay solvent without a minimum of \$10,000 per week. For those households who cannot afford to increase giving at this time, we understand and are grateful for your current generosity. However, we ask that you consider migrating to Parish Pay. We have almost 40 families using Parish Pay.

A simple example illustrates the benefits of Parish Pay. Assume someone misses mass here on 5 of the 52 Sundays per year due to vacations, weather or other conflicts. Their attendance is off 10% and so, in all likelihood, is their contribution. If they were on Parish Pay, the missed weeks would not have resulted in missed collections. Thus a 10% decrease converts to a 10% increase in giving.

Third: Am I giving what I can of my time to support our parish?

Not everyone is called to be a Lector or Eucharistic Minister but everyone is called to ministry of some sort. All of us have a talent, skill or ability to help; and there is much to be done in our parish. Can you teach? Can you sing? Play an instrument? Do you like to garden? Can you cook? Are you a painter? Carpenter? Electrician? Plumber? Can you help with the altar linens? Do you have a few hours a month? We cannot thrive if we are all simply consumers of our Catholic faith. We must get involved in and outside of the pews. Think about how you might help contribute to the life of our parish community. There will be more information on parish ministries in the coming weeks and months.

For those of you who see this message as bleak, I encourage you to resist that temptation. Choose instead to see this as an exciting challenge and a historic opportunity. One that you can be part of.

Pope Francis has embraced the challenge to rebuild our church worldwide. We can do our part locally. As St. Francis said in the 13th Century, "Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

I thank you for your consideration and I look forward to sharing our progress with you in the weeks and months ahead.

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1-866-PARISH 1 (1-866-727-4741)