

From The Pastor's Desk

September 5, 2009

To the members of St. Jude Parish:

During the last several weeks, our parish family has had to sustain difficult decisions made by me after lengthy consultation with the Finance Committee. None of these decisions were arrived at without deliberation and consideration of alternatives. However, the reality is that our income is less than our expenses, most of which are fixed and beyond our control. It is also a reality that the current economic crisis in our nation has had an impact on our ability to meet our financial obligations. Many in our parish family are unemployed and face significant challenges and have been unable to financially support the parish. I am aware of those who are struggling and our ability to respond to their needs is a priority.

The decision to eliminate the position of Pastoral Associate in no way is a reflection on the job performance of Sr. Janice. She has been an inspiration to our community and a dedicated servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Her ministry has made St. Jude a more vibrant and faith-filled community and her loss will add greater challenges as we attempt to continue her vision and dedication to the numerous areas of focus she developed. We will always remain grateful to her and for the blessing we have received through her ministry. For me personally, it was a difficult decision as I have known and worked with Sr. Janice for approximately 11 years here at St. Jude and at Immaculate Conception in Nashua. We have been through a great deal together.

We began this fiscal year with a budget that projected a \$50,000 deficit. This deficit, and the current budget, DOES NOT include the outstanding unpaid assessments and centralized expenses we owe to the Diocese from FYE' 2008 and FYE' 2009. As I evaluated every program and expenditure I had to make difficult cuts. We cut the missals (beginning with this Advent Season), eliminated the children's bulletins, eliminated the inserts mailed to our home bound, eliminated bottled water (used by some staff members resulting from the 1998 oil spill), changed the cable contract to basic economy, sold the parish car (purchased for the previous Pastoral Associate) which brought in \$900 cash and eliminated the annual insurance, registration fees and upkeep, eliminated subscriptions to professional journals, eliminated support materials for the choir (asking choir members to pay for their materials), reduced the art& environment budget resulting in a reduction in flowers, etc., cancelled the purchase of the 2010 Paschal Candle opting to use this year's candle, changed supplier for our communion wafers, eliminated Tithing from our offertory used to help families in need (adding a special Charity envelope to our envelope package for this purpose), reduced the number of families receiving envelopes from 1575 to 850 (sending only to those who historically have used envelopes and families with Children in Religious Education). This is just a cursory listing of cuts.

I suggested a furlough for every employee (eliminating four weeks salary) or a reduction in salary for full-time employees (a reduction of \$5,000 - \$6,000 for each employee for the current fiscal year). I also recognized that such a cut would have an adverse impact on those who could not sustain a reduction and eliminated this step from consideration.

After all the cuts and proposed furloughs, the budgets reflected a \$27,000 deficit. After much discussion, the Finance Committee recommended the elimination of one position. We reviewed each position carefully and agreed on the position of Pastoral Associate – not because it wasn't important or didn't make a contribution to the spiritual and pastoral life of the parish community. That position was selected because the elimination of Director of Religious Education or Director of Youth Ministry would have placed those individuals in a situation of being unemployed in a competitive environment without the benefit of unemployment insurance (employees of the church do not receive unemployment benefits) or health insurance which is provided them by the parish. Not to minimize Sr. Janice's position the Finance Committee recognized that as a Religious Sister belonging to a Religious Order Sr. Janice would not be without health insurance, income stipend (as small as that is), housing and other support. The parish does not pay Sr. Janice directly; rather the Parish pays the Sisters of Notre Dame. Thus, the decision, which was very difficult, was based on who would be impacted the least and still have health insurance and other benefits while utilizing available resources to find a meaningful position in ministry.

I have been looking within the Diocese and making contact with other pastors in an effort to find a position which can benefit from Sr. Janice's experience, spirituality and dedication. I and the members of the Finance Committee are deeply distressed that we had to make such a painful decision, but we could not find alternatives as we attempted to balance the budget. As previously stated, it is important to note, that the \$69,000 in unpaid assessments and centralized expenses we owe the Diocese was not a consideration in this decision. The outstanding expenses are not part of the current fiscal year budget. That situation is a separate and yet unresolved issue which has no impact on the current budget and will have to be addressed in the future.

In an effort to increase revenues, I have increased the stipend to the church for weddings and funerals from \$100 to \$150. Individuals may sponsor the sanctuary lamp for one week as a memorial for a loved one at a suggested donation of \$25.00. I will ask the Lectors to pay for their Lector Workbook. We have formed a Development Committee to host fund raising events and activities aimed at increasing our cash flow. I will evaluate every expense and consider every opportunity to increase our revenues as I do the best I can to ensure the continued vitality, vibrancy and viability of this parish community which is so central to all of us. With the Grace of God - we will survive, we will heal and we will continue to serve the people of God. This is never about us - it is always about Him.

In Jesus & Mary,

Fr. Bob