



Local News

Parishes are hurting during COVID fallout, but help is here

By Lou Baldwin • Posted August 31, 2020



A parish has a lot in common with its parishioners. If it is in a prosperous neighborhood, chances are it has the assets to weather a storm like COVID-19.

If it is in a neighborhood where the folks are living paycheck to paycheck, chances are the parish is living collection to collection.

At this time, according to The Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia (CFGP) average collections throughout the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for the year are down an estimated 20%.

This downturn could be a disaster for struggling parishes but even the most prosperous parishes could be forced to institute cuts to staff and programs in view of a shortfall of that magnitude.

The two primary responsibilities of the Catholic Foundation are “helping our clients with their fundraising and helping donors with their philanthropy,” said Joanne Beck, director of brand marketing at the CFGP, an independent non-profit that works with donors and Catholic institutions throughout the archdiocese, including parishes.

The first response to COVID by CFGP was to raise and distribute more than \$250,000 for emergency relief archdiocesan social service centers and food pantries.

A second phase saw the CFGP launching the Parish Support Initiative, promoted with the help of Archbishop Nelson Perez at his Masses and on his Facebook page, enabling donors to direct their funds to parishes.

That also has been successful as about \$167,000 has been raised through 690 gifts to 121 parishes.

Now a third phase will apply CFGP's expertise to assist parishes in what is called Moving Forward: Parish Stewardship Renewal, with fundraising programs that may be customized and tailored to the needs of the parish.

In this effort the only cost to the parish will be printing and postage, according to Beck. She also mentioned that the costs for printing and postage will be based on the ability to pay. For parishes who may be unable to, financial assistance may be provided. There will be no cost of staff time for the development of these individualized programs.

On average, according to CFGP, that cost ordinarily would be approximately \$3,100. It estimates the printing and postage costs for which the parish would pay will be approximately \$4 per household.

That is a modest sum considering an increased offering, even if only \$5 per week amounts to \$260 a year, and much more for larger increases.

The program be offered in two phases, one beginning this fall and the other in the spring of 2021. Parishes can conduct the stewardship renewal in either session or both if they so desire, according to Beck.

According to the foundation's website, the program is marked by two goals. The first is "restoration," by which the CFGP will help to "recover lost offertory" by conducting an "enhanced annual appeal (block collection)." Such an appeal might be new for a parish or it might expand on a parish's normal fundraising effort "to make up offertory loss or prepare for increased expenses," the website read.

The second goal is "enhancement" by which the foundation will assist in "raising the sights of (a parish's) current offertory through an offertory enhancement program."

In the latter, parishioners are asked to increase their weekly offering, and of course the results are long-term and permanent.

The program is different from the Parish Support Initiative because that "focused on addressing the emergency needs of parishes as a result of the suspension of public Masses," Beck said. "The Parish Stewardship Renewal takes a different approach. It was created with the future of our parishes in mind. This program will rebuild the offertories of parishes that were lost to the pandemic and focus on growth for the future."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CFGP itself has not seen a drop off in giving through its programs.

"People are generous. They want to help people in need and they want to help our parishes" she said, "and we are grateful we can help them do that."

Often, people want to help not only the parish where they reside but perhaps their childhood parish or a parish in a section of the archdiocese with deep poverty in great need of assistance.

Even if your own parish has not been severely impacted, there are quite a few that desperately need a helping hand, especially during this pandemic.

The Parish Support Initiative page at SupportMyParish.org offers a drop-down menu with a listing of every parish in the archdiocese to which one can choose to donate.

Visit the foundation's website at TheCFGF.org for more details on all stewardship programs.

© 2020 Catholic Philly.