



DIOCESE OF JEFFERSON CITY

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

29 March 2020
Fifth Sunday of Lent

Dear Pastors, Parish Administrators,
Parish Life Collaborators, and
Chairs of Parish Finance and Pastoral Councils,

The Second Vatican Council described the Church as a “pilgrim Church,” wherein we travel together on our journey toward heaven. There is a heavenly, unchanging reality of the Church, like her sacred doctrines, and an earthly reality which is adaptable to the needs of people in time and place. “Until there be realized new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells (cf. 2 Peter 3:13) the pilgrim Church, in its sacraments and institutions, which belong to this present age, carries the mark of this world which will pass, and she herself takes her place among the creatures which groan and travail yet and await the revelation of the sons of God (cf. Romans 8: 19-22)” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 48).

One such earthly institution of the Church, which carries with it certain heavenly realities, is the parish. Pope Francis reminds us in his *The Joy of the Gospel*: “If the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be ‘the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.’ This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and lives of its people and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few” (no. 28).

Wherever the people are, there the Church shall be.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our parishes, local communities, the economy and the entire world, we are faced with the reality that several of our parishes and schools may not be able to weather this storm. It depends on how long the pandemic lasts, and it depends on how much we as a pilgrim people can sustain the various institutions of the Church, including the employees who keep our parishes and schools functioning.

With the uncertain economic impact, employers will be judged on how they care for their staff, and the Church is no exception. During this crisis, it is my desire our parishes and schools are able to keep **everyone** employed with regular wages through April 10, which is the April 17 paycheck. This ensures continuity of wages and benefits through the month of April, until the details of the stimulus plan and how they apply to churches and schools are fully understood. Our Director of Human Resources, Cheryl Hertfelder, has been in regular contact with our pastors regarding details of how this will impact our employees.

This extraordinary time requires all of us to have some difficult conversations, which may have been avoided in the past. While some parishes have adequate reserves and vibrant, missionary activity among their parishioners as evangelizers, there are also those that exist from offertory collection to offertory collection and minimal mission activity, and many others somewhere in between.

In order to ensure a proper stewardship of the gifts and talents of the People of God, I ask each parish to submit by April 15 a report of balances (as of March 31) of all available parish funds (operations, parish organizations, school, cemetery, etc.). This information will include where these funds are on deposit, their purpose, and whether there are any restrictions on them. In addition, each parish will list their anticipated revenues and expenses for the next three months. The information requested is a brief version of the parish's annual fiscal report to the Diocese. Please see the accompanying form.

This information on the availability of funds to cover known and anticipated parish expenditures will be gathered by the Finance Office of the Diocese of Jefferson City and organized in the form of a report to me, my chief advisors at the chancery, the College of Consultors, the Diocesan Finance Council, the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Presbyteral Council. The report will be helpful to us as we assess our ability to sustain and enhance the viability and vitality of our parishes and schools both now and in the future.

Some of you may hold the belief that if your parish experiences financial trouble, the Diocese would somehow be able to cover your expenses. While I wish that were the case, it is simply not realistic across the board. Our donors are the same as yours. If the faithful are not giving to their local parish, it is highly unlikely they will choose to give to the Diocese. In addition, most funds the Diocese holds are restricted by donors for specific purposes and cannot be used to assist parishes in financial distress. Finally, like the parishes, our obligations to support how we sustain our mission, including our employees and vendors, continue. Apart from the assistance previously communicated to all the parishes regarding this year's 50% reduction of the Easter assessment, the temporary suspension of interest payments on loans with the Diocese, and the ability to renegotiate loan payments over a longer time, parishes should not expect some sort of bailout from the Diocese to weather this pandemic.

During the Great Depression, some of the greatest cathedrals and churches in this country were built and, at the same time, many social services provided by the Church were begun or expanded. As the pilgrim Church, Christ calls us to accompany our people through these difficult times with faith, hope and charity to demonstrate His love and mercy. In these challenging times, it is important to keep our faithful engaged in the mission of the Church in the use of their time, talent and treasure.

We will survive this pandemic. We will come to the other side stronger if only we remain united in our mission— Better Together! To do so effectively, we must practice good stewardship and co-responsibility with transparency and accountability. Please complete the attached forms and return to the Finance Office at the chancery by April 15, 2020, so that we may make prudent decisions together.

We want to assist you in taking control of your situation. If a parish or school is already in distress, please contact us immediately. Your diocesan team is available to assist you. Please feel free to reach out to our chancery staff, especially the following:

Chief Financial Officer: Dcn. Joseph Braddock, cfo@diojeffcity.org, 573.635.9127, ext. 234

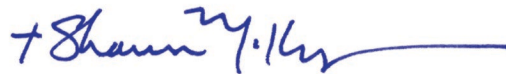
Human resources: Cheryl Hertfelder, HRDir@diojeffcity.org, 573.635.9127, ext. 206

Communication: Helen Osman, hosman@diojeffcity.org, 512.785.3006

Catholic Schools: Kenya Fuemmeler, Interim Superintendent, kfuemmeler@diojeffcity.org, 573.635.9127 ext. 247.

I pray that the pilgrim Church of the Diocese of Jefferson City will remain united in faith, constant in hope, and active in charity as we accompany our people in this pandemic. I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight
Bishop of Jefferson City