



## ST. ANTHONY'S CHURCH

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December 9, 2015

Dear parishioners,

Recently, Bishop da Cunha met with the priests of the Fall River Diocese to inform us that, beginning in January, the diocese would begin assessing each of the 82 parishes to help support the financial operations of the diocese. While this has been a common practice for many years in most dioceses throughout the United States, it is a significant change for us here in Fall River. Each parish will be assessed between 8% and 14% depending on the parish's ordinary income (collections and other donations which stay within our parish.) Based on the Fiscal Year July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015 our revenue is in the 14% range, and therefore our assessment will be \$76,254. I have recently met with the parish finance council to discuss the impact of this assessment on our parish finances and am grateful for their guidance and support.

Let me begin by saying that I certainly understand the need that the Bishop has presented to us. While the diocese is made up of individual parishes and other entities (diocesan schools, health care facilities, etc.) we form part of the whole and are responsible not only for our own "portion of the kingdom" but also share in the mission of the Church beyond our boundaries. As someone who was a part of the diocesan chancery staff (serving as secretary for then Bishop Sean O'Malley from 1994-2000) I have first-hand experience in the workings of the "main office" and know its importance in the life of the local Church. Not a week goes by that I don't need to seek counsel from the Chancery Office regarding specific matters beyond my expertise: legal, insurance, etc. In addition, the Diocesan Tribunal Office assists in regard to all canonical matters (Church law) as well as all issues concerning marriages and annulments. I am thankful we have these diocesan offices in place which greatly help in the administration of the local parish.

Over the years, the Fall River Diocese has faced a number of serious financial concerns including the support for struggling parishes, particularly in the inner cities, who are unable to meet their financial obligations. While the diocesan pastoral planning office is presently discussing the future of these parishes, it is important that the Church maintains its presence in these depleted areas of the diocese where many of our poor and needy live. The diocesan offices are working hard to tighten their belts where possible and have asked parishes to do the same so that together, we can best accomplish the overall mission of the Church.

In this light, I have met with our parish financial council and have begun looking at specific ways that we could be better stewards of parish finances in order to continue meeting all of our financial obligations. Personally, I have tried to do my part by closely monitoring all aspects of spending, including my own. We have kept our staff at a minimum in spite of our responsibility to serve our community, as well as maintain our facilities, including the cemetery. While we have worked hard to maintain our beautiful complex, some projects I had hoped to address might be delayed or spread out over a greater time period. I do pledge, however, not to compromise our mission as a parish to “evangelize and grow disciples.” We just might need to be a little more creative in how we do this. We will do our best, but I am not sure if it will be enough.

So how can you help? Many of you are already doing so by sharing your time and talents and for this I am most grateful. This saves our parish many added expenses. Others make conscientious weekly contributions for the support of the parish. This is our primary means of support. Still others are very generous when we are undergoing a special activity or project.

But, perhaps those who consider themselves parishioners of St. Anthony’s could help in some way. If you have a bit of time, share it with the parish by participating in our many ministries. If you do not regularly contribute to the weekly collection, consider a conscientious contribution through the weekly budget envelope system (or any other means of consistent and deliberate giving.) Unfortunately, of the 1,615 registered households, only about 450 of these, or 35%, regularly support St. Anthony’s in this manner. That includes many of our elderly parishioners on fixed incomes and your generosity is most appreciated. Finally, for those who presently give regularly, perhaps, if your means allow, you could consider a slight increase in your weekly giving. For example, since our assessment is 14%, would you consider increasing your weekly contribution by 10-15%?

Because parishioners here at St. Anthony’s have, over the years, been very generous and my predecessors have been good administrators, we are blessed to have savings in the bank. But, I do not want to start using this money for our annual operational costs, including this assessment, or these savings will soon evaporate and, in turn, jeopardize the future of this parish. And so, with the guidance of our parish finance council, committed staff and generous parishioners, I pray we all will make the effort to live...and grow as a community, but do so within our means.

If there are any questions, please feel free to ask me or one of the members of the finance council. I thank you for your trust in me in serving this wonderful parish community. Please keep me in your prayers and know that you remain in mine, especially during this holy season.

In Christ,

(Rev. Msgr.) Stephen J. Avila, Pastor

Finance council: Mr. John Michaels, Mr. Donald Hoffer, Mr. Michael Donly, Mr. William Malchodi, Mr. Daniel Cunha