

Dear friends,

I have a serious issue to talk about that has been heavy on my heart. I want to speak to you about our financial deficit and the depletion of parish reserves.

Much of our problem results from three years of pandemic limitations and losses. Since we returned to in person worship and activities in May 2021, there has only been a slow recovery of donations and pledges resulting in the very large deficits of 2022 and 2023.

At our January Annual Meeting I said that we anticipated a \$189,000 shortfall in 2023. This deficit has forced us to use our limited parish reserves to cover operating expenses. While we were blessed to have these funds available at a critical time, they will run out in two years if nothing changes.

When I started at St. Francis, I had a vision to grow our church by connecting with the communities around us. This would be accomplished by raising our visibility through worship and special services, adding programs for seniors and younger families, expanding our outreach initiatives into the community, and becoming a center for study and learning where people can deepen and grow in their faith in Christ.

Some small goals have been achieved, but the deficit severely affects what we can do. We no longer have a second priest to support pastoral care, outreach and expanding worship. We are unable to have a person dedicated to developing and running programs for seniors and families, and even the parish newsletter has been cut back to once every two months to save costs.

Back in the spring I asked the Finance and Stewardship committees to work together to develop solutions and strategies. In the next few weeks, you will receive a letter from the Wardens and Treasurer. This will be followed in October by a package with an Estimate of Giving (pledge) form and something new to some of you called a Narrative Budget which will highlight how your financial gifts make ministry happen at St. Francis.

Here are some facts I'd like you to consider when you fill out your 2024 Estimate of Giving form in October:

- So far in 2023 we have adjusted expenses that will save about \$20,000 in 2024.
- We will receive \$10,000 in income from the Co-Learn School for use of space in 2024.
- Donations to the church are slightly above budget year to date, but far below our needs.
- About **150 households, or 50%** contribute to the life and work of our church.
- To have a balanced budget in 2024, all households would need to contribute an **average of \$2400 a year or \$50 per week.**

We need your help to **Close The Gap** and eliminate the deficit.

Questions to consider for 2024:

- How much can I afford to give to support my church?
- How much can I increase my current pledge towards *Closing the Gap*?
- If you haven't contributed since before the Pandemic, please start contributing.
- If you watch the services online but don't contribute, please start contributing.

What will happen if we don't eliminate the deficit?

- More cuts to office support.
- Sextant time may need to be cut affecting parish and community use of our church.
- More parishioners will need to volunteer for set-up and clean up for all events.
- No expansion of pastoral, worship or Christian educational opportunities.
- No money for needed maintenance of buildings and properties.

What will happen if we eliminate the deficit and meet our budget?

- We will be able to invest in resources and staff to grow our church.
- Expand worship, pastoral and social activities.
- Draw in more families and new members through dedicated programming.
- Connect more with the communities of Green Valley and Sahuarita.
- No deferral of maintenance.
- Expand our support of outreach initiatives in our community and beyond.
- Grow more people for Christ!

We need to have a balanced budget in 2024, but we know it may take up to two years to accomplish. To eliminate the deficit by 2025, we need your help to increase pledges by \$80,000 in 2024, and an additional \$80,000 in 2025 based on current operating needs.

I know people do not want to talk about money, but we need everyone who considers themselves members of St. Francis in the Valley to get involved and help us meet our ministry goals and help us to **Close the Gap!**

I believe our financial goals and vision for the future are achievable!! With your help, we will make it happen.

Blessings,

Fr. Warren Leibovitch