

Catholic Service Appeal Shortfalls

How they arise, and what they mean

The Catholic Services Appeal is an annual diocesan collection that provides most of the funds required to operate our diocese. Each year the Diocese of Grand Rapids creates an overall budget and then allocates the total funds to be raised among the diocese's parishes. Each parish is obligated to pay to the diocese its assigned goal. If CSA gifts from parishioners are not adequate, the parish must pay the shortfall out of parish funds. Conversely, if total CSA gifts from members of a parish exceed its goal, the parish is refunded the excess.

St. Francis used to be among the parishes that exceeded its annual CSA goal. However, for five years in a row now, we have had to use parish funds to supplement the CSA gifts of parishioners. This further stresses our already strained finances.

Two factors are likely explanations for our shortfalls. First, the recession has perhaps hurt our CSA gifts as it has our offertory gifts. Second, the Diocese of Grand Rapids changed its formula for allocating CSA goals, and St. Francis's goal is substantially higher under the new rules. The previous formula was more complex and took into account our mortgages and our responsibilities to Corpus Christi School. The transition to the new formula has been tough for us, but no formula would please everyone.

There is, however, a more fundamental explanation for our shortfalls. Apparently, most of our parishioners—even many who contribute faithfully to the parish—are not convinced of their responsibility to contribute to the diocese. A few years ago, we had about 300 households participating in CSA, giving us participation rate of just 25%. In the last couple of years, participation has fallen even lower. For example, for CSA 2014 we have heard from just 246 parishioners as of July 1. Moreover, a very small percentage of our parishioners account for a large portion of our CSA gifts. As of July 1, our top eighteen CSA donors have contributed 50% of the gifts received to date.

To those parishioners who believe that one's financial responsibility does not extend to the diocese and beyond, we invite you to re-examine this position. The word "catholic" means "universal." We have inherited Christ's mandate to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19); and as children of Abraham, we are to be a blessing to all nations (Genesis 22:18). By contributing to CSA, we help the diocese coordinate the efforts of parishes and carry out ministries beyond the scope of individual parishes. We also enable the diocese to contribute to several national and international collections.

For CSA 2013, we came within 12% of our goal, and this year our pledges and gifts are already within 5% of our goal. These gaps are not huge. We *can* renew our tradition of reaching our CSA goals!