



National News

Online programs enable donors to help parishes weather pandemic storm



Pews are seen at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Camp Hill, Pa., May 7, 2019. (CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn)

By Dennis Sadowski • Catholic News Service • Posted April 20, 2020

CLEVELAND (CNS) — Dioceses and their supporters have established special funds to allow donors to help parishes and Catholic ministries get through the economic crisis caused by rapid spread of the new coronavirus.

While the efforts cannot make up fully for the loss of weekend Mass collections, the donations are helping some entities with much-needed funds so they can continue at some basic level of service.

Funds have been created in the archdioceses of Boston, Philadelphia, and St. Paul and Minneapolis and the dioceses of Cleveland and Manchester, New Hampshire, among others.

The fund in Philadelphia enables donors to support their own parishes or those deemed most in need through the [Parish Support Initiative](#). It was established by the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia and manages the annual [Catholic Charities Appeal](#). Donations can be made online as well as by check.

“Just as so many aspects of our lives have been impacted by the coronavirus, our parishes are feeling the impact, too,” said Sarah Hanley, foundation president and CEO.

Weekly collections provide “the vast majority of operating income, roughly 95% for a parish,” reported Arjun Dias, director of the archdiocese’s Office for Parish Service and Support.

“Most area parishes have seen significant declines” in weekly collections, Dias said, with an average loss of about 57%.

While Masses and devotions have moved online, electronic giving at parishes has lagged, he said.

“While 87% of our parishes are equipped with e-giving, the utilization rate is roughly 20%,” Dias said. “So a lack of public Mass means declining collections.”

Officials at the Diocese of Manchester, New Hampshire, established the Together in Faith: Parish Support Fund to help parishes.

Announcing the fund April 16, Bishop Peter A. Libasci said the loss of weekly collections is making it difficult for parishes to cover expenses related to ministry, maintenance, employment and other needs.

“Throughout history, Catholics have always responded abundantly to the trials they have faced. We respond, we sacrifice and we give out of love,” Bishop Libasci said in encouraging contributions to the fund in a statement released by the diocese.

The Diocese of Cleveland launched its Emergency Response Fund in late March for parishes with limited funds to address the immediate needs of families and individuals affected by illness or job loss because of the pandemic. Donated funds are being used to help parishioners buy food, cover rent and utilities, and pay for health care.

The diocese’s Catholic Community Foundation opened the fund with a \$500,000 contribution.

The diocese and its foundation also established another online program April 7 to help all 185 parishes meet continuing expenses as weekly collections declined. In introducing the Universal Offertory Program, the diocese said individual donors can designate which parish will receive funds.

Meanwhile, donors have given \$55,000 through the online #iGiveCatholic Together platform as of April 20 in the three weeks since it was announced, said an official with the funding operation. The platform supports ministries in about 45 dioceses.

Julie Kenney, national program director of #iGiveCatholic, which oversees the platform established in response to the pandemic, told Catholic News Service the program helps dioceses and archdioceses of all sizes but especially those where there is not a strong online parish donation program.

The platform allows individual donors to donate to designated ministries, such as schools, a food bank or a Society of St. Vincent de Paul parish council, to receive funds as long as it is registered on the site, Kenney explained.

“We’re starting to see now repeat gifts. The platform has been open a few weeks and people are setting up recurring gifts,” Kenney said.

The original #iGiveCatholic program was launched in 2015 by the Catholic Community Foundation of the Archdiocese of New Orleans for the annual Giving Tuesday campaign. It has expanded to include dioceses and archdioceses nationwide.

Elsewhere, the Archdiocese of Boston’s 90 Days Now — For Your Parish campaign introduced March 31 is “going strong” with 198 parishes benefiting, said spokesman Terrence Donilon.

“These are funds that go directly to the parish at a critical time when offertory has been impacted during the pandemic,” Donilon said.

Acknowledging the “hardship and suffering” many parishioners are experiencing, he said the archdiocese expects that the church and society “will emerge from this experience stronger and more committed than ever to sharing our faith with the people of the archdiocese and those seeking to join us.”

In addition, the Minnesota Catholic Relief Fund is collecting donations for church ministries in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. It is run by the St. Paul-based Catholic Community Foundation of Minnesota, a private enterprise.

The fund was established in late March after public Masses were suspended in Minnesota.

Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda welcomed the relief fund in an April 2 letter to the archdiocese in which he encouraged parishioners to continue supporting the Catholic Services Appeal Foundation, which helps fund a variety of ministries.

At the time, he said, weekly collections had dropped precipitously, however, later reports indicated the decline, while still deep, was not as severe as originally feared.

Contributing to this story were Joe Ruff, news editor of The Catholic Spirit, newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, and Gina Christian, a senior content producer for CatholicPhilly.com, the news website of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

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