

## Diocese Takes First Step In Meeting Budget Shortfalls

By Bishop Victor Galeone

I would like to give you an update on the present status of the diocesan financial deficit problem that I discussed in the November/December issue of the St. Augustine Catholic. After mentioning the causes of the \$1.3 million shortfall for the present fiscal year, I explained that there are only three ways that any entity - "be it the government or an individual - " can go to resolve a deficit: increase income, reduce expenditures, or use a combination of the two. We selected the third option. The purpose of this update is to explain how the diocese is fulfilling its commitment to reduce spending needed to support our diocesan mission.

Last spring all pastors were asked to complete a survey evaluating our diocesan ministries. About 65 percent of the pastors responded, with some adding written comments to their appraisals. On Oct. 14, the diocesan staff met and was asked to submit concrete suggestions as to how the diocese could reduce expenses. Within ten days, 34 staff members submitted 54 recommendations.

In early November I formed a Ministry Evaluation Committee comprised of seven lay Catholic professionals to evaluate our diocesan ministries to see where spending could be reduced. No diocesan employees served on this committee. I attended the initial meeting only to spell out their charge before excusing myself. They were asked to study the recommendations of the pastors and diocesan staff and interview department heads for more information, if necessary. By early January, I wanted to receive concrete recommendations from them on how the diocese could reduce its annual \$5.2 million budget by ten percent. I encouraged them to be very candid; they could recommend that a ministry be eliminated, downsized, or combined with another ministry if necessary. I also informed them that I alone would be fully responsible for the final decision.

On Jan. 13, 2004, I met with the committee to review their final report. After seven meetings, they presented me with more than 36 recommendations, both specific and some generic in nature. If I had accepted all of the recommendations, the diocese could have trimmed more than \$600,000 from the annual budget. Since that was not possible, the projected savings for the diocese is about \$550,000 for each fiscal year.

By eliminating or combining a ministry, ways were studied on how the diocese could continue to serve our parishes without diminishing services rendered. The Diocesan Liturgical Commission could well serve as a model. Two years ago, the staff director for the Diocesan Liturgical Office tendered his resignation to accept a position in one of our parishes. Since that time, the Liturgical Commission, composed of volunteers, has been ministering to our needs in the area of liturgy under the able direction of their chair, Father Tom Willis. The Justice and Peace Ministry is another example. Since their director retired in January, the Justice and Peace Commission will continue to challenge our parishes in this important area and all paid staff positions will be eliminated.

Some other ministries and services affected include:

- Eliminate Parish Social Ministry.
- Eliminate funding for diocesan archives.
- Eliminate funding for the weekly televised Mass. The last Mass will air on March 28.
- Eliminate the position of Director of Cemeteries.
- Reduce the budget for Campus Ministry by replacing current staff with a new program to serve the Jacksonville universities.
- Reduce the budget for the Ministry of Justice and Reconciliation.
- Reduce funding for the Respect-Life Office.

- Combine the African and Native American Ministry and the Hispanic Ministry into a new Multi-Cultural Ministry. Two moderators have been appointed: Father James Boddie and Father Rodolfo Godinez, replacing the two salaried directors of the previous ministries.
- The weekly newsletter for clergy, *Pastoral Briefings*, will be sent via email rather than the U.S. Postal Service.

In closing, I would like to say that the past two months have been among the most trying since I became bishop. It is extremely difficult to find oneself without a job. My heart goes out to all the employees who have been affected by the restructuring of diocesan ministries. The diocese will make every effort to help place laid-off employees in parishes that have openings in their fields. I want to thank these employees for their loyal service to the diocese. Please pray with me that all the employees affected will soon find challenging work commensurate with their skills and training.