

## Meeting the Challenge, Together

By Bishop Victor Galeone

*"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! For his love endures forever!" (Ps. 107)*

This recurring theme in the Bible is especially appropriate as we prepare for the Thanksgiving holiday. We have much to be thankful for in our diocese. Our priests, deacons, sisters, lay ministers and volunteers are dedicated to serving the needs of a growing Catholic population. And while that growth is a blessing, it doesn't come without challenges. These are the challenges that I want to address in this message. Most of what I'm about to say was treated in the video or audio message that was presented in your parish the first or second Sunday in November. But for the sake of those who may have missed it, as well as to reinforce it for those who heard it in church, I want to present this summary.

For the present fiscal year, our diocese is experiencing a financial shortfall of \$1.3 million. We are not alone. All the Florida dioceses are running deficits, resulting in employee layoffs, curtailment of programs, or an increase of parish assessment quota/

Our present deficit is due to three factors:

- \$700,000 - the subsidy needed to operate our new high schools. Until a school reaches full enrollment, tuition must be bolstered with outside funding. (Bishop Kenny High School. Would never have survived its first 20 years without help from the surrounding parishes.)
- \$400 - the subsidy for our vocation program. One of the components of The Opportunity of a Lifetime Campaign was a \$2 million endowment for this purpose. But for that to happen, many pledges must still be redeemed, and the stock market must generate the necessary interest.
- \$200,000 - to replace the roofs on the main building and on the three dorm buildings at Marywood Retreat Center, all of which have developed serious leaks.

How can we together meet this challenge? I emphasize the word "together," because too often, there appears to be a rift between the parishes and the diocese. At times, parishes view the diocese as an adversary: "us" versus "them." Let me remind you that we are a family, and since we are a family, then we should bear in mind what St. Paul told the Christians at Corinth: "There should be no division in the body (of the Church)...If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; and if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy" (1 Cor. 12:25-26).

Now to answer the question: How are we going to meet the present challenge together? There are only three choices: 1) Increase income. 2) Reduce spending. 3) Some combination of the two. I have decided on the third option.

First, the diocese will commit itself to reduce spending. Diocesan ministries have already met, and we are presently studying ways to trim our respective budgets.

The parishes, in turn, are asked to give more help with the annual assessment until the present deficit has been resolved. A new quota formula has been developed that will no longer be referred to as a "tax," but rather promoted as "sharing arrangement." The diocese and parishes are all members of the same family. And family members aren't taxed; they share. The method of sharing will be equitable for all parishes, both large and small. See the box to the left for specifics.

The following two points are significant:

- There will be no Stewardship Appeal this spring. In the future, the Stewardship Appeal will be conducted in the fall of each year.

- It's crucial that those parishes that are using the Diocesan Stewardship envelopes, continue to do so throughout 2004. Our calculations have been based on the income that was pledged in last spring's Stewardship Appeal.

In closing, I would like to stress how important it is that we approach stewardship with grateful hearts. Once we realize how much God has blessed us, we will want to repay in kind. And the Lord will never be outdone in generosity.

*"You remember the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that through his poverty, you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).*

#### **TWO LEVELS OF PARISH SHARING**

10% on the first \$200,000 of income

18% on all income over \$200,000

Categories: offertory, building funds, bequests and special donations (capped at \$100,000), interest, dividends, rents, stewardship appeal and miscellaneous.

Exemptions: national collections, mortgage payments; first \$100,000 of school subsidy, poor box, votive lights, bingo and bazaars.