

# Alberta economy is affecting donations, but archdiocesan appeal on track to \$2M target

With only a few weeks until the end of the year, there's a final push for donations to the Together We Serve annual campaign, which supports Catholic causes in the Archdiocese of Edmonton and around the world.

Together We Serve, the primary charitable fundraising effort for the Archdiocese, runs each year from Lent until Dec. 31.

For the third year in a row, its overall goal is \$2 million. As of Nov. 30, 73 per cent of that goal – \$1,466,595 – had been raised. That's down slightly from the 77 per cent achieved at the same time last year.

"We are a little behind last year, but not a lot," said Connie Lunde, director of development for the Archdiocese of Edmonton. "The Christmas collection is the biggest collection. It changes a lot in December."

Together We Serve donations help support the 83 parishes in the Archdiocese as well as Catholic Social Services, Development and Peace, the Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith in the Northwest Territories, the St. Joseph Priests' Foundation, St. Joseph Seminary, St. Joseph's College Campus Ministry, and national and international leadership efforts by Canadian bishops and on behalf of Pope Francis.

As of Nov. 30, 12 of the 83 parishes had met or exceeded their fundraising targets for Together We Serve. St. Alphonsus Parish, a relatively small parish in an economically challenged area neighbourhood near downtown Edmonton, raised \$20,604 – 222 per cent of its target with a month still to go. At year-end in 2018, St. Alphonsus had raised \$11,545 – 124 per cent of its target.

That generosity is borne out of parishioners who see the needs of their community.

"For St. Alphonsus, it's a reality," said Rev. Glenn McDonald, the associate pastor. "We have families in need of help and in need of housing. And we rely on God's providence to keep St. Alphonsus going."

Last year, the Together We Serve campaign raised a total of \$1,925,283, or 96 per cent of its goal. Thirty-seven parishes met their fundraising targets and 49 parishes raised 70 per cent or higher.

Lunde said the economy has the greatest influence on donations, with parish contributions down in general due to the Alberta economy, but the Together We

Serve campaign is on track.

“I think Catholics are generous,” Lunde said. “Stewardship messaging is hugely important, looking at everything that you have is given to you by God, and in thanksgiving – like the good steward – you return to God, and you do that by helping other people.”

There’s an additional incentive for parishes to exceed their Together We Serve donation targets.

Any amount over the target is returned to the parish for local initiatives, which could include charitable outreach, new ministries, or church improvements.

Lunde noted that donations to Together We Serve ebb and flow throughout the year. They are higher during Lent and at Easter, taper off during summer holidays, and rise in the fall until Christmas.

The Archdiocese Development Office is promoting pre-authorized payments, in an effort to provide a more stable source of funding for parishes and giving that is more intentional.

“It levels out those peaks and valleys for a parish,” Lunde said. “In parishes it is stressful. They have salaries to pay and utilities to pay. When you start pre-planning your giving, it starts a journey of generosity. When you just pull out money from your pocket, is that being generous?”

Anyone interested in pre-authorized payments is asked to contact their local parish.