

# Archbishop Smith appeals for donations in absence of Sunday collection basket

Archbishop Richard Smith is appealing to Catholics for financial support as the drop in donations due to the COVID-19 pandemic has forced layoffs of church staff and even threatened the viability of some parishes in the Archdiocese of Edmonton.

The majority of donations to parishes come through the collection basket passed during Sunday Mass. Those have virtually disappeared since public celebrations of the Mass were suspended on March 16 – a measure taken to help slow the spread of COVID-19. The result has been temporary layoffs at parishes and at the Pastoral and Administration Offices of the archdiocese. Financial Administrator Wayne Provencal estimates that 22 of the Archdiocese's 124 parishes and missions are on the edge of serious financial risk.

In a video appeal for donations, Archbishop Smith acknowledged that charitable giving won't be easy for many during current financial conditions.

"I know that these are financially challenging times," he said. "You may have lost your job, or your business viability may be threatened. Your savings may have been diminished by market conditions. And I understand that your primary financial responsibility is, of course, to your own home and family.

"I hope you'll understand that I still need to ask that you also remember your spiritual home, which is your parish. I'm inviting you prayerfully to consider how you can continue to support your parish's mission, to the extent possible during this extraordinary time."



## Rev. Joby Augustin

St. Francis Xavier Parish in Camrose, which opened a new building in May, is more than \$12-million in debt and now receives less than one-third of the \$35,000 it typically gets in monthly donations.

“It’s a considerable loss. This pandemic has basically doubled our struggles,” said Rev. Joby Augustin, the pastor of St. Francis Xavier. “Even without this pandemic, we are not a big enough parish to pay our debts. Now, our monthly utility bills of \$3,000 we may struggle to pay.

“We are looking for government support. Without that, we cannot survive.”

The COVID crisis forced the parish to lay off two staff and cancel fundraising events.

Father Augustin said the parish is receiving some money through preauthorized donations, and a handful of people are dropping off donations directly at the parish.

“I know people cannot be pressured too much. So many have lost their jobs,” he said. “But we ask them to help us with whatever they can afford to sacrifice.”

The twin parishes of St. Alphonsus and St. Clare, which serve an economically challenged area in north Edmonton, have always struggled financially. Since public masses were cancelled, donations have dropped by at least 15 per cent.

However, Rev. David Bittner, the pastor of St. Alphonsus and St. Clare, believes the parishes will find a way through the impact of the pandemic.

“In a sense we’ve always been running on a shoestring,” said Father Bittner. “This is a more extreme version of what we’ve always had to deal with. We’re not a parish that can support big things, but we survive because our people do whatever they can, and often beyond what they can.

“Often many of our parishioners cannot give financially, but we have other very generous donors who really believe in the mission of this church.”

The parishes have relied heavily on donors who contribute through an automatic deposit. Those donations have continued and protected the parish office from any layoffs.

However, the parishes hope for future government support through the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, which pays 75 per cent of employee’s wages for non-profits affected by COVID-19.

There are still a variety of ways Catholics can support their parish. Donations can be offered online at most parishes; check the individual parish website for

a donation link. Some parishes also offer pre-arranged regular donations from a parishioner's bank account.

Alternatively, donations can be made via the Archdiocesan website at [caedm.ca/donate](http://caedm.ca/donate). The [caedm.ca/donate](http://caedm.ca/donate) link allows a donor to select the parish to which they wish to donate. Both online donation options allow people to set up a monthly automatic donation through their credit card.

Donations can also be mailed to parish offices or dropped off at the parish office's mail slot.

The drop in Sunday collections has also affected the archdiocese, since parishes forward 22 per cent of their collections to fund its various operations ranging from chancery and administration to training and education programs for parishes, to marriage tribunal and Grandin Media.

According to the 2018 audited financial statements, the archdiocese received \$4.4 million from parish collections and recorded a deficit of \$450,000. This year, 22 archdiocesan employees have received notice of temporary layoff, representing nearly half the staff of the Pastoral and Administration Offices. Several others are working reduced hours. Some of the remaining employees are donating a portion of their salaries.