

Dear West River Catholics,

Last week, the Associated Press ran a story about the Catholic Church's participation in the Paycheck Protection Program. This story was picked up by some local media, including the online edition of the *Rapid City Journal*. Headlined "Sitting on billions, Catholic dioceses amassed taxpayer aid," the article reports that the Church received "special treatment" and that Church entities took money they wanted but didn't need. After reading the article, one could be forgiven for thinking the Church is flush with excess money. I can only speak for our diocese, but let me be clear, the opposite is true.

First, a bit of background. Congress made clear in enacting PPP that its intent was to protect workers from layoffs. As a non-profit employer in South Dakota, the Diocese of Rapid City and many of its parishes qualified for the program and were encouraged by the Small Business Administration to apply. After all, we experienced the same decline in income experienced by so many of South Dakota's employers – income needed to make payroll for our full and part-time employees. The intent of the law was to protect employees, regardless of who they worked for, and our employees qualified for that protection under the law.

Anyone who reads our diocese's annual financial report (published in January for all to see) might chuckle at the AP's headline. I wish we had billions of dollars to spend on sharing the Gospel in western South Dakota! The AP article seems unaware of a reality that is obvious to many West River Catholics: we're a mission diocese, which means we have lots of territory with relatively few and smaller communities, and that we rely on grants from Church entities in other regions even for basic operations. A substantial portion of the assets on our balance sheet are tied up in real property: the churches, cemeteries, and schools in which we seek to live and pass on the faith. In other words, we are not swimming in cash.

With the resources we do have, we seek to be good stewards, managing our finances with responsibility and prudent moderation. Through the generosity of the Faithful, God provides for us – but we don't have many zeroes at the end of our bank account balances. Speaking of the generosity of the faithful, conspicuously absent from the AP story was any mention of the many children educated in Catholic schools or the poor served by our social services, all at no expense to the taxpayer. I want you to know how grateful I am for your financial sacrifices and commitment to providing for the poor and the needs of the Church. Even if the AP doesn't know of your generosity, I do, and I'm grateful for it.

The past year has been a challenging one to say the least. Finances have been a part of that, and PPP served as a bridge to keep hardworking employees off of unemployment and serving in the jobs they do so well. The PPP program gave us, like other non-profits, including other churches, much-needed help to weather the pandemic and continue our vital work in the communities we serve.

Once again, thank you for all you do to support the work of the diocese. Please continue to pray for our mission diocese as it does the work of the Church with very limited resources.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Rev. Peter M. Muhich  
Bishop of Rapid City