

# Annual Appeal provides support in uncertain times

The food stamp allowance is \$30 a week, and when Catholic Charities executive director Bill McCarthy took the Food Stamp Challenge to live on that equivalent for a week, his blog and the Catholic Review story about his experience got a lot of comments. One reader asked for reprints of the article to show his mortgage company how tough it is to live on the minimal amount the lender wanted to allow for food in his budget.

With unrest in Libya, the price of oil shoots over \$100 a barrel; on that news gas prices in our area jumped more than 20 cents a gallon. What kind of impact does that have, not just on families, but on our parishes and archdiocesan ministries that need energy to heat and cool their buildings?

The Catholic Review's Feb. 17 story about the annual archdiocesan finance report carefully analyzed the news about the archdiocese's most recent fiscal year numbers, noting in the headline: "Archdiocese posts \$15.4 million surplus." A subhead in the print edition (but not the Web version) noted, "Two years of cutbacks help turn the tide." That good news was the upshot of the report. Hard work and sacrifice by a lot of people over the past year, plus an improved stock market, led to the gains.

The story noted that the archdiocese utilized furloughs, made significant staff cuts and cut costs in other ways. Stock market gains also helped contribute to the bottom line, but those aren't available in liquid form. It's not like the archdiocese is flush with cash. Senior Writer George Matysek did a good job of analyzing the information, bolstered by an interview with Mark Fetting, chairman of the Archdiocesan Board of Financial Administration and CEO of Legg Mason in Baltimore, who provided important context.

A surplus of \$15.4 million in one year is great news, especially in a recovering economy. What needs to be kept in mind – and what the story noted – is that this gain comes on the heels of two very rough years for the archdiocese. The deficit for

fiscal 2009 was \$34.3 million; in 2008 it was \$22.4 million. Faced with those figures, this year's surplus covers less than 30 percent of the previous two years' negative balances. So, the archdiocese is not flush with cash.

But some saw the initial headline and thought: "If there's a surplus, why can't the archdiocese go back to funding this ministry or that project?" It's not that simple. Fiscal 2010 ended well; but it took a lot of effort to get there. Baltimore Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien and those who work at the Catholic Center will continue to be vigilant stewards of the resources entrusted to the church.

The church continues to need our support, in the parishes and in the Archbishop's Annual Appeal. In that way, the archdiocese can continue to provide the charitable services and ministries that are crucial to the mission of the church. The economy continues to recover, but many people still look to the church for assistance. The church still needs to educate and evangelize; we cannot relinquish our duty to assist the church in its various missions. The Archbishop's Annual Appeal provides again the opportunity to "Give Yourself to God."

*Christopher Gunty is associate publisher/editor of The Catholic Review.*