

On Earth as in Heaven: counting the cost

11/3/2018 Andy Figueroa

Jesus said, “*For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?*” (Luke 14:28)

Jesus uses the conventional wisdom of first *counting the cost* when talking to his followers about the cost of discipleship. *Counting the cost* is what the vestry does when they develop the parish budget. We do pray, *give us this day our daily bread*, trusting God, and we do our due diligence with the conventional wisdom spoken of by Jesus, because many church budgets have been sunk through blind leaps of faith.

Planning parish finances is a lot like doing an ordinary household or small business budget. The difference is that parish income is the offerings that are integral to worship. That is why we often talk about money in the context of worship, offering, and sacrifice.

Unlike many congregations, we don’t ask you to pledge future financial support. Instead, to give the vestry more than just historical giving patterns, and to encourage thoughtful and deliberate giving, we ask you for an estimate (confidential, non-binding) in the spirit of being part of the *counting the cost* process. To this end, estimated giving cards will be provided for your use on and after November 18.

Every parish in the diocese would be pleased to have the financial support that you give to Holy Trinity. The table below shows the result of estimated and actual giving for recent years. (Note: School finances are separate. See last paragraph for some surprising details.)

Year	Cards Received	Total Estimated	Ordinary Income (tithes & offerings)
2018	49	\$204,450	<i>\$215,000 budgeted</i>
2017	49	\$205,974	\$209,331 actual
2016	47	\$193,933	\$215,131 actual
2015	44	\$176,780	\$196,899 actual
2014	44	\$162,762	\$187,532 actual

We were humbled when we learned that the numbers don’t always go up, but we are exceedingly happy with the overall trajectory. In church finances, our experience is almost unheard of. Parish leaders across varying traditions always plan on receiving less than people have indicated they might give. Additionally, Holy Trinity has never had a year where expenses exceeded actual income.

Furthermore, the table only shows what we call ordinary income, that money given to support our day-to-day expenses. The people of Holy Trinity also contribute many thousands of dollars designated for projects, the school, and to support ministries outside of our parish.

Still, it’s the vestry’s responsibility to always be appropriately concerned. Our challenges include increasing prices, regular building maintenance needs, and maintaining proper clergy and staff compensation. We trust those needs will be met through a combination of increased giving from current members and new streams of giving from those who have recently come.

Finally, parishioners need to know that Lindisfarne Hall maintains its own budget and pays its own direct expenses with student tuition and fees along with donations made to the school. We realize that some parish facilities and supplies expenses have gone up because the school uses them, and that’s OK because Lindisfarne Hall is a ministry of Holy Trinity. A related concern, though, is the possibility that generous parishioner giving to Lindisfarne Hall might have a negative affect on ordinary giving to the parish. We don’t know that it has, but we do know that some parishioners give regularly to the Lindisfarne Hall scholarship fund, and that, so far just this school year, parishioners have already given \$33,750 to the scholarship fund, which is amazing.