Dear Parishioners,

 This past week, the Associated Press reported that the Catholic Church received between 1.4-3.5 billion dollars from the Paycheck Protection Program. Many people have criticized the government giving all this money to the Church and some have even connected it to the clergy sexual scandal. They don’t want their money to go toward the Church and presumably other houses of worship. However, since the Catholic Church is the largest denomination and because of our stance on many social issues of today, we become easy targets for criticism. I’ve already heard from both Catholics and non-Catholics on how undeserving the Church was to receive this money.

 I would like to take this time to try to address this issue. I begin with a quote from one bishop:

“The Paycheck Protection Program was designed to protect the jobs of Americans from all walks of life, regardless of whether they work for for-profit or non-profit employers, faith-based or secular,” Archbishop Paul Coakley, chairman of the U.S. bishops’ conference committee on domestic justice and human development [said in a July 10 statement](http://usccb.org/news/2020/20-114.cfm).

“The Catholic Church is the largest non-governmental supplier of social services in the United States. Each year, our parishes, schools and ministries serve millions of people in need, regardless of race, ethnicity or religion. The novel coronavirus only intensified the needs of the people we serve and the demand for our ministries. The loans we applied for enabled our essential ministries to continue to function in a time of national emergency.”

“In addition, shutdown orders and economic fallout associated with the virus have affected everyone, including the thousands of Catholic ministries -- churches, schools, healthcare and social services -- that employ about 1 million people in the United States,” Coakley added.

“These loans have been an essential lifeline to keep hundreds of thousands of employees on payroll, ensure families maintain their health insurance, and enable lay workers to continue serving their brothers and sisters during this crisis.”

 The Catholic Church is not a monolithic structure with the bishops controlling everything. The reality is that the Catholic Church is made up of individual parishes and institutions situated in a geographical local known as a diocese with the bishops as its shepherd. The parishes contribute to the financial operations of the diocese which provides a range of services including Catholic Education, outreach to the poor and training of potential priests. We are the Church- not just bishops and priests. It’s up to all of us to support the work of the Church and pay our own bills.

 If you remember, this money was intended to keep people on the payroll and any misuse of the money had to be returned with interest. It was not to pay for anything else- including anything regarding lawsuits or payments to victims of sexual abuse.

 St. Michael’s was one of about 12,000 Catholic parishes throughout the country to apply for this loan. If you remember, this loan came at a time when the entire country was shutting down- including our parish. With no money coming in, we still had obligations to pay our parish employees, including our teachers. As a result of the loan, we received enough money to cover the parish payroll for two months- thus keeping our people on the payroll (and off public assistance).

 The Finance Council and I debated long and hard as to whether or not we should accept the loan. Each member of the Finance Council shared their reservations and their reasons why we should accept the loan. In the end, we decided to go ahead and apply for it. We had to submit documents surrounding our payroll and keep records as to how the loan was spent. I think we did all that was and is expected of us regarding the loan.

I don’t regret taking the loan because ultimately, who is the government? As long as **we** pay our share of taxes and exercise our right to vote, we are the government. The purpose of this loan was to help small businesses over a two-month period when presumably this crisis would be over. We qualified for the loan and it was a God sent to the parish at that time. Although the crisis continues, we are in much better shape in terms of going forward, especially into the fall.

Part of the financial package passed by Congress is something known as the Cares Act. This was intended to help schools adjust to this time of crisis by providing money that could be used to help better educate our students. One important aspect of the Act was that the money was to be distributed to the local School district who would in turn distribute to the schools where the students were attending- including Catholic schools in the district.

Unfortunately, that money is currently tied up in the courts to determine how to interpret the law. When we heard that this money was available to us, we decided to purchase a commercial cleaning machine for the classrooms, gym and cafeteria. However, when it became clear that it might take a while to get this money, we went ahead and purchased this machine- thanks to donations from both the Knights of Columbus and NCCW. By going this route, we could use and do use this machine to clean the church after each Mass and in the school- there are no restrictions on its use because we purchased it.

 I know that you may be confronted by friends and family who may complain that their tax money is going to the support of the Church. Again, I would like to remind everyone, that it was not illegal to apply for this and other governmental services, and because of it, we are able to continue to offer services that benefit our fellow human beings.

 The Catholic News Agency reports: “[In the United States, both parishes and dioceses are facing serious financial shortfall](https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/analysis-the-us-church-is-going-broke-heres-why-and-what-it-could-mean-71222)s and in Rome, t[he Vatican has run sizeable budget deficits for years](https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/with-major-deficits-projected-vatican-says-holy-see-not-at-risk-of-default-60364). While the Catholic Church has assets of artistic, cultural, and historic value, those are not easily liquidated, and with few exceptions, Catholic entities around the world have been facing a serious cash crunch for years.”

In his statement, Coakley acknowledged that ‘more than 100 Catholic schools have announced that they plan to close, with hundreds more facing an uncertain future. Businesses, hospitals, schools, and churches all across the country are facing many of the exact same problems.’

“We will continue advocating for everyone negatively affected by this terrible pandemic, praying for all the sick, for all who have died and are in mourning, and especially the poor and vulnerable at this time of great need.”

Peace… Fr. Tom