

Is It Time to Adjust Your Plan?

While attending a meeting of parish business administrators recently, we posed several questions to the group regarding their Sunday collections. Sixty percent of those in attendance reported that their actual collections during the first half of this fiscal year were either about even with or slightly higher than actual collections last year during the same period. However, an astounding 78% reported that collections were lagging the amount they had budgeted for this fiscal year.

Since these budgets were conceived and approved prior to most of the shockwaves hitting our economy this autumn, it isn't surprising that so many parishes are reporting collections being under budget. Since approximately half of the fiscal year has passed for the group we met with, it is apparent that many in the room that day are going to have to develop a contingency plan or make alterations to their budget *now* in order to successfully navigate the remainder of the fiscal year.

Many view budgeting as a fairly static process whereby once the budget is approved it is placed on the shelf until the following year when a new one must be created. At CFC we view the budget, and its implicit financial plan, as being much more dynamic. The budget, like any other type of plan, is likely to be challenged as conditions around you continuously change.

It has been said that in budgeting there is one thing we know and two things we don't. The thing we know is that budgets will not be correct. The two things we don't know are 1) by how much, and 2) in which direction. If we accept the reality that the world around us is always changing (both positively and negatively), then it is necessary also to accept that changing conditions may require us to adjust our plans.

It is important for all of us to understand that there is no shame in adjusting our plans or our budgets. The real shame would be failing to adjust our plans when conditions require it, thereby either putting ourselves needlessly in harm's way or failing to take advantage of an emerging opportunity.

College or professional football fans recognize that over time, the most successful coaches in the game are the ones who are willing to go into the locker room at half-time and make the adjustments necessary to win in the second half. For them, there is no shame in adjusting to changing conditions. And the really great ones know that timely decisions are the key to successful adjustments.

Current conditions have dealt a body-blow to many sectors of our economy. Parish life and parish finances are not totally immune to the storm swirling around us. However, with prudent planning, by recognizing when the plan needs to be adjusted and taking appropriate action, we all may position ourselves to emerge from these chaotic times stronger and better able to pursue our ministries and achieve our mission.