

December 20, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

+JMJ

Perhaps many of you have heard that Sr. Mary Jo Toll and Sr. Liz Garcia have moved their *EnCamino* office from our parish building. Here is how all of that came about.

When I arrived at the parish in July, I learned that both Sister Mary Jo and Sister Liz are retired. They are no longer parish employees, nor part of the staff. The full focus now of *EnCamino* is helping undocumented immigrants to become documented. In recent years both sisters have become certified in this work by the Department of Justice, after having gone through training regarding the immigration process and its paperwork. In June of 2020 *EnCamino* received a \$23,000 grant from the Heritage Mission Fund of the Precious Blood Sisters. A new parish bank account was set up just to hold that grant money. The sisters already had some *EnCamino* funds in a parish account that holds both the sisters' money and other reserved monies of the parish. While I think that the sisters are working for a worthy cause, I have become convinced that it doesn't really fit under the umbrella of the parish mission; and, therefore, the parish should not put so many resources towards the sisters' work.

First there were personnel resources: As we downsized the staff of the offices, I was sure that we could not afford to serve the sisters' work. All of the staff has been involved at one time or another (sometimes for hours or days) meeting the needs of the sisters. This included plenty of technology help, as well as doing all of their banking, and keeping all of their finance records.

Then there was the space resource: the sisters had a pretty big office on the first floor of the parish office building, free of any charge. With the imminent sale of the school property, we needed a place to put our maintenance office, which up until this time has been at the school.

Of course we should use valuable resources for a parish ministry; but the sisters' work is not really a parish ministry. The pastor has no oversight or discretion regarding the ministry. The pastor up to this point has just signed whatever checks the sisters request from their *EnCamino* funds. It's not at all "parish money". It's my strong opinion that it makes no sense for the pastor to be signing checks for a ministry for which he has no pastoral responsibility. The sisters' work is totally independent from a pastoral perspective; and I'm certain that the sisters need it to remain that way in order to implement their own vision.

Then there were some financial and tax and legal concerns. I learned that the sisters had begun hiring some of their own clients to help in the work. I saw seven training clinics on the debit card statements; and then I saw check requests to pay people for hours worked. Then I learned that no tax forms were requested or submitted for those workers. This raised my awareness of the legal and financial/tax implications of having the sisters' work under our parish tax identification numbers. I knew that I really should be monitoring the work closely, if it would stay under the parish tax identification numbers.

With all of this in mind, I consulted with the Diocese, and then with the Sisters of Notre Dame leadership; and then I decided to ask our sisters to detach *EnCamino* from the parish, both leaving the office space, and becoming financially independent from the parish as soon as possible. We have written a check to the sisters for about \$8,232, the amount remaining in their parish "local *EnCamino*" fund. The sisters can put this money into an account in their name, not under the EIN of the parish. The sisters plan to use this "local *EnCamino*" money for overhead at their new office (lawn care, office

supplies, utilities, etc.) and for ongoing education, materials and renewed licensing for the two of them. If parishioners want to donate to the work of the sisters, we will have brochures in the office with information to help people contact the sisters directly. The parish will no longer receive any money for the sisters' work.

I have been pressed to keep open the account that contains the remaining Heritage Fund grant money, because the sisters fear some penalty, if they would try to move this money out from under the parish EIN. Of the \$23,000 granted last June, about \$8,000 remains in this account, as of the time of this letter. Once this money runs out – which the sisters tell me should be in the Spring sometime – I have asked the sisters not to use the parish tax ID number any longer to obtain grant money. They plan to apply for more grant money to continue the work; and they are looking for another tax exempt organization to sponsor them. Perhaps they will even find a way to set up their own independent 501(c)(3)? Or perhaps their own religious order might sponsor them? Or perhaps Catholic Charities would cover them, after a vetting process? I have been praying every day that the Lord provide for them.

Have a blessed week!

In cordibus Iesu et Mariae,

Father Poggemeyer