



MONSIGNOR CHARLES V. ANTONICELLI
MODERATOR OF THE CURIA

June 12, 2018

Dear Brother Priests,

Recently several of our parishes have received emails masquerading as pastors or other parish staff asking to purchase gift cards on their behalf. These attackers have then asked the gift card details be sent back to them in an attempt to extort money. In the past we have also seen similar activities where an attacker impersonates a pastor and attempts to instruct staff to initiate a wire transfer. Please always keep in mind that the Church in Washington is a public organization, which often results in targeted phishing scams. In most cases the attacker will do their homework and use public information such as pictures, email addresses, pastor's names and parish names to attempt to tailor a phishing email to a specific parish or person. Please keep in mind the following guidelines to help detect and avoid falling victim to these scams.

- **Check the senders email address.** Next to the display name you'll commonly see the actual email address within brackets, such as <bob@yahoo.com>. Remember that even this address can be spoofed so it cannot be always relied on as an indicator. This will only give away less sophisticated attackers.
- **Check for spelling and grammar mistakes.** In many cases phishing scams will contain notoriously poor grammar and spelling.
- **Beware of websites asking for unrelated information.** In some cases links in a phishing email will send you to a website asking for unrelated information, such as your computer or email username and password. If a website asks for information such as this, the email is a scam.
- **Receiving unexpected email.** If you receive an unexpected email, such as a password reset that you did not initiate, do not click on any of the links in the email. Instead, if you question the legitimacy of the message, go directly to the real website in question and login.
- **Trust, but verify.** When in doubt and asked to send money or gift cards via email, contact the person through known legitimate means to confirm the request.

These are all important things to look out for, but no one single item is necessarily a foolproof indicator. It's important to take all of these guidelines into account and look out for a blend of potential problems with a suspect email.

With gratitude for your priestly ministry, I am

Sincerely in Christ,

Reverend Monsignor Charles V. Antonicelli
Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia