

Diocese of Worcester
Office of the Bishop
49 Elm Street
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I write to you at this time in light of the economic crisis facing our nation. I wish to offer my prayerful support to you, the people of the Diocese, many of whom find yourselves in a time of great uncertainty.

The economic unrest that has visited us will continue to have a serious impact on the people of the nation. We know that some families have already lost their homes. It was recently announced that \$2 trillion of retirement savings have been lost and the savings of many more are at risk. Hundreds of thousands have lost their jobs or benefits or both. Others may experience these losses in the coming weeks and months. Throughout our society many are increasingly concerned about their ability to provide for their family's basic needs.

All of us have listened to those advisors who tell us that the fundamentals of the American economy remain essentially sound. They point out our strengths in manufacturing, communications technology and the service industries. We have been told that we are experiencing a "crisis in confidence" and that our economy will inevitably rebound.

Others, including longstanding experts in the financial markets, have stated that we cannot be certain of the direction of the economy, that we are now on "new ground." In more prosperous times, they would have pointed to the regular ebb and flow of the business cycle. Many of these economists have been chastened by new developments in our economy and are more humble in their approach.

We know, sadly, that the behaviors and misjudgments of some corporate leaders, as well as some of those in public service, have led to this crisis. Unfortunately, vulnerable people have been harmed by their actions. It is also true that some in our society have brought on some of their own personal troubles by reaching for too much with too little. Greed is a deadly sin with very harmful consequences.

Obviously, the problems of the people of the nation are evident within our own Diocese as well. As we seek to address realistically and correct the economic downturn, this is also a time for encouraging personal spiritual renewal and for believing the truth of the Gospel. In the teaching of the Lord himself, we find our common vision: "*Do not lay up for yourselves an earthly treasure. Moths and rust corrode; thieves break in and steal. Make it your practice instead to store up heavenly treasure, which neither moths nor rust corrode nor thieves break in and steal. Remember, where your treasure is, there your heart is also.*" (Mt. 6: 19-21)

During times like these many Catholics, as well as others of good will, often reassess their primary values and core beliefs. For many, the opportunity exists to rediscover a life of trust in God, of simpler choices, or the blessing of family life. At this time we find ourselves in a unique position to offer the assurances of the great treasury of Christian

tradition, which continues to assert what we have always believed: that our ultimate hope lies in our relationship with the Lord and that our principal virtues are faith, hope and love. This is a very timely message indeed.

The Church must also give witness to one of the ancient signs of her holiness, that of generosity. We are all inspired by the description of the early Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles, where we read, *"Those who believed shared all things in common; they would sell their property and goods, dividing everything on the basis of each one's need."* (Acts 2: 44-46)

Our parish communities should be especially attentive to the needy among them. It is my hope that there be a heightened pastoral concern for those who have suddenly lost employment, benefits, a mortgage, or retirement income. The efforts of parish St. Vincent de Paul Societies, Knights of Columbus Councils, Food Pantry workers, Justice and Peace committees, as well as other existing parish groups, might well play an important role in bringing solace and genuine relief to vulnerable parishioners. Every parish should employ the most suitable means to provide for its needy.

I want you to know that I have spoken to the administrators of Catholic Charities, regional directors of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and other regional leaders and asked them to be attentive to the needs of those who seek comfort from these institutions. I have also written to the priests of the Diocese about these important concerns.

In addition to those pastoral opportunities to express our generosity and care, I want you to know that the Diocese will continue to exercise great fiscal constraint in its operations. We are continuing to monitor the direction of the financial markets closely. Doing this, we will conserve, as best we can, the savings and investments of our parishes, institutions and the Diocese itself. We have already taken steps to improve the liquidity of many of our assets so as to insure the cash flow so vital to diocesan and parish operations.

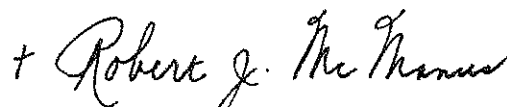
At the same time, we will continue to exercise prudence in approving requests for funding and for building and improvement projects. I have asked the Board of Governors of the Diocesan Expansion Fund to be especially vigilant in reviewing all the proposals which come before it. It would not be prudent to approve projects for which we could not obtain cash if liquidity were to become an issue, as it has for many institutions.

Similarly, at the parish level, it is urgent that we conserve the resources of the faithful, who make free will offerings, gifts to the Lord and his Church, in Christian generosity. As we are all asked to give generously to the Lord and the Church, each of us also has a role to play in carefully stewarding the gifts of the people of God.

I sincerely appreciate all that you are doing to strengthen the spiritual and communal vitality of your parish. Please be assured of my prayers in these challenging times.

With every prayerful best wish, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert J. McManus". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus
Bishop of Worcester

October 24, 2008