

A PASTORAL LETTER FROM MICHIGAN'S
EPISCOPAL & ELCA LUTHERAN BISHOPS

December 4, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Michigan is suffering from the impact of the deepening economic crisis. Our churches are places of solace and assistance for people affected by this situation, and we see so many in need. Already reeling under the strain of 9.3 percent unemployment rate—the nation's highest—the uncertainty of the future of the Detroit Big Three is devastating for our state.

As Christians we are often referred to as communities of hope. It is with that hope, grounded in our faith, that we see this crisis as an opportunity to move forward. We support the strengthening of our economy and the auto industry for the short and long term and ensuring justice for workers who have for so long been the cornerstone of our nation's economic engine.

According to a recent study by the Center for Automotive Research at the University of Michigan, it is not just the auto workers who would be impacted by a contraction of the Detroit Big Three. As many as 790,000 workers in the manufacturing supply chain across the country could lose their jobs. These losses would only further amplify the economic crisis both here in the United States and around the world affecting workers in every sector of the economy.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan:

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins[e] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Now is not the time for our country to continue walking on the other side of the road, ignoring the plight of our economically battered-workers. This is the time to reach out as the Good Samaritan did to care for another even at our own expense.

When Congress considers its options for action, we hope that they focus on ensuring a path that benefits the most workers possible and securing both the short and long term success of the auto industry by not using funds already dedicated to helping the industry retool for better environmental efficiency.

There are hard decisions to be made, but we hope that any assistance given to the automakers will attempt to balance the immediate needs of workers with the long term viability of our economy by concentrating on long term stability through restructuring and on the strength of the company as a whole.

While our nation's decision makers labor to chart the right course for the economy, our churches continue to do what we are called to do always – minister to those in need and pray for both those in need and those making the hard decisions about our nation's future. We commend your prayers and action in this matter.

Faithfully,

Bishop Robert Gepert, Diocese of Western MI
Bishop Wendell N. Gibbs, Jr., Diocese of MI
Bishop Todd Ousley, Diocese of Eastern MI
Ms Linda Piper, Chair, Standing Committee,
Diocese of Northern MI

Bishop Kenneth Olsen, Southeast MI Synod
Bishop John Schleicher, North/West Lower MI Synod
Bishop Thomas Skrenes, Northern Great Lakes Synod