



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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September 26, 2008

Secretary Henry Paulson
Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Minority Leader John Boehner
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Speaker Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Secretary Paulson, Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader Boehner:

The economic crisis facing our nation is both terribly disturbing and enormously complicated. I write to offer the prayers of the U.S. Catholic Bishops and express the concerns of our Conference as you face difficult choices on how to limit the damage and move forward with prudence and justice. As pastors and teachers, my brother bishops and I do not bring technical expertise to these complicated matters. However, we believe our faith and moral principles can help guide the search for just and effective responses to the economic turmoil threatening our people.

- Human and Moral Dimensions: This crisis involves far more than just economic or technical matters, but has enormous human impact and clear ethical dimensions which should be at the center of debate and decisions on how to move forward. Families are losing their homes. Retirement savings are at risk. People are losing jobs and benefits. Economic arrangements, structures and remedies should have as a fundamental purpose safeguarding human life and dignity. The scandalous search for excessive economic rewards even to the point of dangerous speculation that exacerbates the pain and losses of the more vulnerable are egregious examples of an economic ethic that places economic gain above all other values. This ignores the impact of economic decisions on the lives of real people as well as the ethical dimension of the choices we make and the moral responsibility we have for their effect on people.
- Responsibility and Accountability: Clearly, effective measures are required which address and alter the behaviors, practices and misjudgments that led to this crisis. Sadly, greed, speculation, exploitation of vulnerable people and dishonest practices helped to bring about this serious situation. Many blameless and vulnerable people have been and will be harmed. Those who directly contributed to this crisis or profited from it should not be rewarded or escape accountability for the harm they have done. Any response of

government ought to seek greater responsibility, accountability and transparency in both economic and public life.

- Advantages and Limitations of the Market: Pope John Paul II pointed out that “the free market is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs...But there are many human needs which find no place on the market. It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied.” Both public and private institutions have failed in responding to fundamental human needs. A new sense of responsibility on the part of all should include a renewal of instruments of monitoring and correction within economic institutions and the financial industry as well as effective public regulation and protection to the extent this may be clearly necessary.
- Solidarity and the Common Good: The principle of solidarity reminds us that we are in this together and warns us that concern for narrow interests alone can make things worse. The principle of solidarity commits us to the pursuit of the common good, not the search for partisan gain or economic advantage. Protection of the vulnerable – workers, business owners, homeowners, renters, and stockholders – must be included in the commitment to protect economic institutions. As Church leaders we ask that you give proper priority to the poor and the most vulnerable.
- Subsidiarity: Subsidiarity places a responsibility on the private actors and institutions to accept their own obligations. If they do not do so, then the larger entities, including the government, will have to step in to do what private institutions will have failed to do.

This is a challenging time for our nation. Everyone who carries responsibility should exercise it according to their respective roles and with a great sensitivity to reforming practices and setting forth new guidelines that will serve all people, all institutions of the economy and the common good of the people as a nation. This includes not just the leaders of the economic life of our country. It means the political leaders and all those whose own expertise can contribute to a resolution of the current situation.

Our Catholic tradition calls for a “society of work, enterprise and participation” which “is not directed against the market, but demands that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the state to assure that the basic needs of the whole society are satisfied” (*Centesimus Annus*). These words of John Paul II should be adopted as a standard for all those who carry this responsibility for our nation, the world and the common good of all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "W. Murphy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend William F. Murphy
Bishop of Rockville Centre
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and
Human Development