

# “Christ Our Hope”

*“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”*

John 1:5

## My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

As the liturgical year comes to a close and we begin a new Church year with Advent, we face incredible challenges and much uncertainty with regard to the economic well-being of our families, our Church and our metropolitan area. As people of faith and with Christian hope, we trust God is with us *precisely* in times of loss, pain and darkness. We believe He will work with us to grow closer to Him and one another through these tough times.

Advent is a season of hopeful expectation. At this darkest time of the year, we proclaim that Christ is our light and Christ is our hope. While the government and business communities are searching for reasonable and just solutions to the current economic challenges, the Church seeks to help us put these things into a spiritual perspective.

Again and again, the Scriptures for these weeks of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany proclaim God’s Word of consolation and hope, even in the midst of uncertainty, loss and suffering. On Christmas Eve, we will hear the encouraging words of Isaiah, words that ring true for believers in every age: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone ... For a child is born to us, a Son is given to us.”

We will also hear the message the angels addressed to the shepherds that first Christmas, a message we need to hear more than ever: “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy ... a Savior has been born for you, who is Christ and Lord.”

As your archbishop, I am writing to offer some pastoral insights and suggestions about how we might prepare



to celebrate Christmas this year when economic conditions are so grim.

Many people in our community have lost their jobs and homes; countless others live in fear of losing their homes. Some face the likelihood of harsh pay cuts, while others have lost their pensions and personal investments. The automobile industry, our primary employer, is going through major challenges and transitions. While many of us have lived through other times of downsizing and economic downturns, this time, the prospects for recovery require radical changes. Things in Michigan will probably never be the same.

Like our brothers and sisters all around the world and over the course of the centuries, the residents of this area have always been people of extraordinary tenacity, perseverance and determination, ready to do whatever it takes to survive, even to thrive. As believers, we have all the more reason to see

these challenging times as an opportunity to be resourceful. Living more simply can be spiritually purifying, bringing us closer to God and one another. Wherever there is death, there is also reason for hope and resurrection, new birth and new life. After a fire 200 years ago devastated our then-frontier settlement of Detroit, Fr. Gabriel Richard wrote: “We hope for better things; it will arise from the ashes.” Those words inspire us to this day as the motto of the City of Detroit.

## Part One: Our overall vision—the common good

*Love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor ... rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.*

Romans 12:10-12

Ultimately, the economy is not just about money; it is about people—about us—fellow human beings made in the image and likeness of God. Our spiritual well-being and our human dignity do not depend on the fluctuations of the stock market. No matter what happens to industry or big business, we belong to God and have rights as well as responsibilities for one another. When we feel anxious about things we cannot control, we need to meditate all the more on God’s investment in us and His desire that we live as His family supporting one another.

God made us social creatures. We grow and thrive by being in relationships and by being in families and in communities of faith and service. None of us can live for very long all on our own. We crave the loving support, and challenge, of being with and for others. Each of us has something to give and each of us has some need to receive. We are all at our best when we are part of a healthy flow of giving and receiv-

ing in respectful relationships.

Every aspect of our Western culture has trained us to think and act competitively. We often speak of “winners and losers.” Mistakenly, these dynamics can suddenly be transferred to larger economic concerns. As the Advent Scriptures remind us, instead of giving into divisiveness, each day we need to renew our commitment to the common good, remembering we are truly brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the one same God and Father. As the birth of the Son of God in our midst teaches us, we are called to live in solidarity.

When Pope John Paul II visited the archdiocese in 1987, he spoke eloquently and poetically about the virtue of solidarity to which the Polish people gave special witness and testimony during the darkest hours of Communism. He explained that the word “solidarity” rose up from the shores of the shipyards along the Baltic Sea and became part of our universal vocabulary as a word and virtue that “rolls like a wide wave over the face of the whole world which realizes we cannot live according to the principle of ‘all against all’ but only according to another principle ‘all with all,’ ‘all for all.’ Solidarity...must take precedence over conflict.”

For prayerful reflection:

- WHEN I MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT ECONOMIC MATTERS FOR MYSELF AND MY FAMILY AND MY CO-WORKERS, IN WHAT WAYS DO I TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE LARGER COMMON GOOD?
- DO I APPROACH PEOPLE AND THINGS IN A COMPETITIVE OR A COLLABORATIVE MANNER?
- TO WHAT DEGREE AM I WILLING TO SACRIFICE MY OWN CONVENIENCE OR MY OWN DESIRES FOR CHRISTMAS GIFTS SO THAT I CAN OFFER ASSISTANCE OF TIME OR TALENT TO OTHERS?

## Part Two: Charity, our hope and joy

*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*  
Matthew 23:39

Building on Scriptures from St. Paul and St. John, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in his first encyclical, “God is Love,” that



each of us has been “loved into being” by God’s surprising and unmerited, selfless love. We were made for love. Naturally and spontaneously from childhood, we reach out for a loving connection with others.

At Christmas, we contemplate the mystery, the love of God sending His son to become one of us, with us, for us—a God of solidarity. Once we realize how deeply we have been loved by this ultimate charity, we cannot help but want to love and give to others in return. Our very custom of gift-giving at Christmas is truly a reflection of God’s divine gift-giving that we celebrate at Christmas.

Being charitable means more than just being generous on an occasional basis or feeling a stirring of empathy for another person in urgent need. Charity is ultimately about our need to give. Charity is indeed a vocation, a life-long calling that comes from being baptized daughters and sons of God. It is a way of giving in which the other is always affirmed and strengthened, ennobled and dignified. In Christian charity, we strive to see the face of Christ in the other and we want the person receiving our charity to see Christ’s face in us. As St. Augustine once put it, we should speak of “one Christ loving Himself” through us.

Pope Benedict stresses, even though there is a legitimate role for government to ensure the rights of all, especially the most vulnerable, the state cannot possibly provide for everyone. As he says, there are many other “living forces” that must respond to the needs of people, needs which often go beyond our desire for “bread alone.” The Church as an organized institution has a role and a responsibility to be one means of such charitable outreach and service.

Here in the archdiocese, in our parishes and through many social service agencies, we have a long and distinguished record of service for people of all backgrounds. Many of our parishes have been offering job fairs and discussion groups and counseling for those who are seeking new employment opportunities. We are proud to have an active St. Vincent de Paul Society, our Catholic Social Services agencies, and other faith-based programs that provide resources for body and spirit.

The Catholic Church partners with many civic and ecumenical organizations to address the immediate and long-term needs of people of all ages and circumstances. We also commend the many other non-profits who provide “daily bread” to individuals and families, day in and day out. We can take pride in the 40-year history of Focus: HOPE, which was the visionary response of three Catholic leaders to challenges at a time when our nation was going through political turmoil and

sociological transition. We need the same kind of innovative, compassionate strategies today.

There is something each of us can, and must do, every single day for one another. While we may not have the economic means to help others, every one of us has the ability to pray and find a way to be of service. Charity is a way of life, a virtue to be nurtured daily through prayer and action. We give love to God for His own sake and love to our neighbors on account of God.

Hope dawns as we cooperate with the grace of God that calls us to conversion and turning away from anxiety about self. God asks us to be purified and simplified so that our awareness of His presence and love will be all the more vital and dynamic.

Prayer, alone or with others, is one of the most powerful “medicines” or therapies of all; as we pray, we discover a sense of peace and a fresh perspective. We begin to see ourselves and our circumstances as God does. As Pope Benedict says, “seeing with the eyes of Christ” we can give to others “the look of love they crave.”

Let us consider God’s love for us and our ability to love one another. In the context of the Christmas season, I ask you to meditate on the Christ Child in the crib, giving thanks to God for the many ways you have been touched and loved by the charity and goodness of others in the past. Consider also how God has used you in very specific ways to be a sign and source of hope and healing for others and how you might—even now—be more generous in giving of your time, talents, or treasure.

For prayerful reflection:

- HOW MIGHT I SHOW CHARITY TO OTHERS IMMEDIATELY AROUND ME?
- HOW MIGHT MY CHOICES FOR CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS THIS YEAR BE DIFFERENT?
- DO I NEED TO CONSIDER A SIMPLER STYLE OF LIVING?

### Part Three: Eucharistic stewardship

*All things work for good for those who love God.* Romans 8:28

We are stewards of gifts and blessings that do not belong to us. Everything about our lives is a gift from God. In the U.S. bishops’ 2002 pastoral letter on stewardship, we are reminded that “... as Christian stewards, we receive God’s gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord.”

The archdiocese, along with our parishes and schools, agencies and institutions, is especially conscious to exercise careful and deliberate decision making when using all the resources entrusted to us. As Church leaders, we are called to be much more than just practical or thrifty; we know that good stewardship is also an act of faith, an act of witness and thanks to our Creator, an act of solidarity with our brothers and sisters.

As Catholic Christians, we celebrate our stewardship as we gather for the Holy Eucharist. We give back to the Heavenly Father all that He first gave us. When we offer the bread and wine, we are offering our daily labor, our joys and our sorrows. The Lord, in turn, accepts what we offer and transforms it, consecrating it into His Body and Blood. He then returns it to us as nourishment for our body and spirit, trusting that we, in turn, will keep the cycle going as we share our resources with our brothers and sisters.

Our communion with the Lord necessitates a communion with each other. Communion can only happen when there is first some sacrifice, a decision to allow ourselves to be diminished. In the Holy Eucharist we enter into the sacrifice of Christ and recognize that everything we are and everything we have is a sharing in His redeeming, transforming love.

To celebrate and fully appreciate the rich potential of the Holy Eucharist, we need to think of this sacrament as a true sharing of gifts, asking ourselves what

do we bring to the Lord and what do we need to receive from Him. Our holy exchange of gifts is not only about material things, but first and foremost about compassion and mercy.

For prayerful reflection:

- WHAT GIFT WOULD I LIKE TO OFFER THE LORD THIS CHRISTMAS?
- WHAT GIFT DO I RECEIVE FROM HIM?
- WHAT GIFT DO I RECEIVE FROM OTHERS?
- HOW CAN I PUT THE EUCHARIST INTO ACTION BY BEING MORE GENEROUS WITH OTHERS IN NEED OR BY BEING WILLING TO HUMBLY ADMIT MY OWN VULNERABILITY AND DEPENDENCE ON MY OWN NEED TO RECEIVE?
- DO I BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF PRAYER AND THAT IN MANY WAYS PRAYER IS OUR GREATEST RESOURCE?

### Conclusion: A people of hope

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in His great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* 1 Peter 1:3

Sometimes in life we feel we have little power over the circumstances around us. Who of us—single handedly—could change the flow of our economy or turn things around? And yet, each of us has the power to hear God’s Word and to use our time and talents to express concretely and creatively our solidarity with our brothers and sisters, many of whom are profoundly suffering in body or spirit. This holy season of Advent and Christmas provides us countless opportunities for charity, something as simple as a smile, a “thank you” to the grocery bagger, taking a tag from the Giving Tree, visiting or helping the homebound.

We all need to receive and we all need to give. Most of us find it much easier to give; it is humbling to admit we need the help of others. Everything about our culture encourages us to be self-reliant and independent. As we have seen, our lives are interwoven. In today’s unusual circumstances, many will need to admit their need for help from relatives, friends or the Church; please remember

there is no shame in such vulnerability. Every one of us has something to give, something to offer.

During the Depression, my own family suffered greatly. I truly believe we became stronger through the challenges. Hardest on me, as a six-year old, was the loss of our home in a terrible flood. I will never forget watching the raging waters destroy our community. And I still recall my father's assurance to us that everything would be all right, that we were all together and safe in God's hands.

Each person—no matter what—has the power to make a difference, the power to build up, affirm and strengthen. Alone, we cannot do it. But together, we can proclaim, even at this time of darkness, that Christ is our light and Christ is our hope. We wait together for the coming of the Lord. We trust His coming will be as certain as the dawn and the light of His love will make us into a people of hope.

May the Lord bless our nation, our world and especially our region as we begin a new chapter of our history. May the light of Christ shine upon us and through us so we may be ministers of Christ's message of hope to one another and to all in need.

Please be assured of my special prayerful remembrance of you and your families during these holy days of Advent and Christmas.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

Adam Cardinal Maida  
Archbishop of Detroit

Issued on the Second Sunday of Advent  
December 7, 2008



## A SEASON OF HOPE

LOVING FATHER,  
YOU KNOW THE FEARS  
AND ANXIETIES THAT WEIGH  
US DOWN EVEN AS WE  
PREPARE TO CELEBRATE THE  
JOY OF YOUR SON'S BIRTH  
AMONG US.  
IN THE DARKNESS OF OUR  
UNCERTAINTY, GIVE US  
RENEWED CONFIDENCE  
IN YOUR PROVIDENTIAL  
CARE AND OUR OWN  
POTENTIAL TO WORK  
TOGETHER FOR A SHARING  
OF GIFTS WHEREIN NO  
ONE'S NEEDS WILL BE LOST  
OR FORGOTTEN.  
MAY WE PROCLAIM WITH  
NEW COURAGE THAT JESUS  
YOUR SON IS THE TRUE  
LIGHT OF OUR LIVES, THE  
FULFILLMENT OF ALL  
OUR HOPES AND THE  
LASTING JOY OF EVERY  
HUMAN HEART.  
WE ASK ALL THIS  
THROUGH JESUS YOUR SON  
WHO LIVES AND REIGNS  
WITH YOU AND  
THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD  
FOREVER AND EVER.  
AMEN.

PRAYER FROM CARDINAL MAIDA

## "Christ Our Hope" Resources

Among the Catholic parishes with career-ministering groups, resources or assistance in the Detroit archdiocese:

### St. Andrew Parish

1400 Inglewood, Rochester  
2nd and 4th Thursday, 7 p.m.  
(248) 651-7486

### St. Joseph Parish

715 N. Lapeer Road, Lake Orion  
Online materials at [stjosephlakeorion.org](http://stjosephlakeorion.org)  
(248) 693-0440

### St. Thomas à Becket Parish

555 N. Lilley Road, Canton  
Every other Tuesday, 7 p.m.  
(734) 981-1333

### National Shrine of the Little Flower Parish

Shrine Conference Center at Woodward  
and 12 Mile, Royal Oak  
4th Monday of the month, 6:45 p.m.  
(248) 541-4122

### Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish

47650 N. Territorial Road at Beck Road,  
Plymouth  
Dates/times to be determined  
(734) 453-0326

Many Catholic and faith-based groups provide opportunities for those wishing to offer their time, talent or treasure to our brothers and sisters in need. That list, along with additional information and resources, will be continuously updated on the archdiocesan Web site [AODonline.org](http://AODonline.org).

A special e-mail address has been established at the archdiocese to facilitate inquiries: [ChristOurHope@aod.org](mailto:ChristOurHope@aod.org).

Cardinal Maida's letter, "Christ Our Hope," appears in the December 5 edition of The Michigan Catholic newspaper. An audio Podcast of the pastoral will be available online. Special programming will appear on The Catholic Television Network of Detroit (CTND).

La Carta Pastoral del cardenal Maida, "Cristo, Nuestra Esperanza," los materiales, los recursos para las parroquias y la oración se encuentran disponibles en español en [AODonline.org](http://AODonline.org).

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