

Therefore, we as two bishops of our Churches urge our leaders in both business and politics to further all efforts to make opportunities for employment, training, and advancement that grow out of this hopeful time of growth and expansion accessible to all.

The Bible is full of questions about, “Who is my neighbor?” and “To whom am I a neighbor?” In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus reminds us that when we do right by and for others, we serve Jesus. God now offers Western New York this opportunity to live out our faith in a way that strengthens our communities for today and for tomorrow creates a better region for our children and our grandchildren — where all they have to offer will be valued and rewarded.

Join us in advancing this noble and creative vision of hope and renewal.

Yours in Christ,

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Joint Pastoral Letter on the Renewal of Western New York

December 14, 2014
Third Sunday of Advent

To Our Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This letter comes to you on the Third Sunday of Advent, when we Christians continue our journey from darkness into light. As we sing in the familiar Advent hymn, we remember Israel, “that mourns in lonely exile here/ until the Son of God appear.” This is a time for anticipation, waiting, and joyful expectation of new light and new life. Soon we shall celebrate again that Emmanuel — God with us — is here.

This is a pioneering letter. It comes to you from two bishops — Roman Catholic and Episcopal — who, incidentally, live just a block from each other in Buffalo’s Elmwood Village. We join in writing this letter because the new light and the new life that we write about affects all of Western New York and the two dioceses we lead as bishops, not just the City of Buffalo or County of Erie.

There could be no more dramatic example of the interdependence of the City of Buffalo and the region surrounding it than the lake-effect snowstorm of mid-November. The city and the northern suburbs received virtually no snow, but the suburbs and counties to the south and east were pounded with record-breaking snowfall. We saw what happens when we are cut off from each other. Employees were unable to get to work. Roads that were drifted shut with six feet of snow meant no deliveries of goods and services. School and church services were cancelled. Rescue vehicles and ambulances could not get through.

We can measure the cost in lost productivity — dollars and cents — but more importantly, we can measure the cost in what happens when we are unable to function as one united region, cooperating with one another, relying on each other, supporting and benefitting each other. It doesn't matter that there is no snow in North Buffalo when Lackawanna and Lancaster and even Cowlesville in Wyoming County are overwhelmed, when hundreds of vehicles are stranded on the Thruway, when buildings are collapsing, when the entire region cannot operate normally. The snow plows cleared the roads for all of us.

This historic corner of New York has always been the home of pioneers who saw what many others did not: the value of hydropower from Niagara Falls, the significance of the Erie Canal to open up what was then the Western Frontier, arts and culture in Chautauqua and at the Roycroft, the verdant agricultural and timber lands of Western New York, the value of key positions on the railroad lines between New York City and Lake Erie, Buffalo as the Queen City, reigning proudly over shipping and heavy industry on the Great Lakes and beyond.

It has also been a pioneering place for those who knew that justice, freedom, peace, and dignity reap their own benefits. As a region we have historically supported the abolition of slavery, the extension of rights to all people, and religious tolerance, though we did not always respect and protect the dignity and culture of our Native American peoples.

Today, after many decades of decline, the City of Buffalo — and by extension, all of Western New York — is on the brink of unprecedented prosperity: new business, new investment, new construction — accomplishments unimaginable 20 years ago. A new generation of Western New Yorkers is envisioning new opportunities and making them a reality. With regard to education, medicine, technology and quality of life, this is the time for which we have all waited and prayed and worked. This wave of prosperity benefits not only the city, but the entire region.

Yet at this time not everyone is benefitting. Blacks and Hispanics still live in poverty in greater proportion than do other groups in our population. Children still go to bed hungry. Jobs and security elude too many families. And because some are left out and locked out, the rest of us are poorer. We fail to benefit as much as we might from this new golden age.

This must change.

And positive change is possible for gone are the days when the photographs of our leaders show mainly images of white men.

Gone are the days when we ignore leadership and authority in the voices of women or those who first spoke a language other than English.

Gone are the days when the creativity and innovation of those whose experiences and backgrounds — different from our own — are excluded from our work force, our cultural circles and our educational institutions.

But there is still much to be done, for gone too are the days when the wages paid to many for a 40-hour workweek are sufficient enough to pay for basic housing and food for workers and their families.

And yet, this is the start of a new day.

For us as Christians, as bishops, as spiritual leaders of this region, this new day is not just an economic concern, or a business concern, or a public relations concern. For us, it is a Gospel concern. In this new day before us we hope to see The Kingdom of God on earth reflect the community Jesus built around him: full of women and men, minorities, the poor, and the marginalized. In this new day we hope there will be plenty for everyone, that all will share in the bounty, and labor will be adequately rewarded. We envision a just society where the dignity of every human being is respected.

This is our hope for Western New York, where the prosperity generated in one place of renewal must ripple throughout the region. The economic renewal of our region must be a renewal of the Gospel values and ethics that we share as sisters and brothers in the Christian faith. What we say and pray on Sundays must now go out into the world, into the workplace, to the ballot box and to the councils of government to ensure that Western New York becomes a more prosperous community, not only in dollars, but in our investment in each other. Jesus did not call for a society in which each person was out solely for personal gain. He called for a kingdom of shared prosperity, generosity and justice, a society that is more human because it is in conformity with the Kingdom of God.

We have been pioneers once in settling this region. We ask you now to be pioneers again in supporting efforts to maximize the strengths and gifts of those — all women and all men, native-born and immigrants — who offer their skills and their desire to prosper and make our region prosper once again.

The richness of a diverse workforce enriches all of us.