



Arizona Catholic Conference

Diocese of Gallup • Diocese of Phoenix • Diocese of Tucson

Ronald M. Johnson, Jr.
Executive Director

April 17, 2009

The Honorable Jan Brewer
Governor of Arizona
1700 West Washington
Phoenix, AZ 85007

The Honorable Kirk Adams
Speaker of the House
Arizona State House of Representatives
1700 West Washington
Phoenix, AZ 85007

The Honorable Bob Burns
Senate President
Arizona State Senate
1700 West Washington
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Dear Governor Brewer, Speaker Adams, and President Burns:

As the Bishops of the Arizona Catholic Conference, we want you to know that our thoughts and our prayers are with you at this time of unprecedented challenge to our State.

We know that you are being pulled in many different directions as you try to extricate our State from the present budget crisis.

We know that you care about the people of our State and that you share with us concerns about the most vulnerable among us.

We were saddened and shocked – as we imagine many, many Arizonans were – to learn from a recent news report that our State ranks second in the nation in terms of the size of its deficit in comparison to its base budget. The magnitude of the \$3-billion deficit seems almost beyond comprehension.

You were recently quoted, Governor Brewer, as saying, "We have a catastrophe here in Arizona." We agree with you.

We share with you in this letter our concerns and the perspective from which we view the immense task before you.

The Catholic Dioceses in the State of Arizona have a 75-year history of responding to the needs of individuals, children, and families who are economically, socially, or physically vulnerable.

For a little more than 30 years of this history, these programs and services have involved partnerships with governmental jurisdictions, including the State of Arizona.

Through our partnership with the State, the trusted and cost-effective community based programs of our Catholic Charities have been able to serve the increasing numbers of people coming to their doors seeking help.

The present budget crisis threatens the benefits of this long-standing and mutually supportive relationship.

Reductions in state funding drastically have reduced the number of children and families we can help. For example:

- In the Diocese of Phoenix, six locations that provided services to at-risk children and their families have had to close.
- The number of nights of shelter care for abused women and children in the Dioceses of Tucson and Phoenix has been reduced in five of our Catholic Charities shelters. Some of these shelters are in rural communities and are the only safe haven for abused women and children.
- The elderly poor in the Diocese of Tucson who depend on our agencies for a daily meal are being placed on waiting lists.
- Our clinics that serve people without insurance and who do not qualify for government programs because they earn more than the maximum income have been forced to eliminate their Arizona Primary Care funded visits for the last quarter of this fiscal year. This situation has created a gap in care for about 3,000 people, even while the number of persons seeking these visits has increased by 215%.

- People with disabilities who are seeking employment and training with the assistance of our programs have been placed on a waiting list.
- The only program serving people who are deaf and hard of hearing in Maricopa County, a program of our Catholic Charities, may have to close within the next three months.

Our concerns go beyond the impact of the fiscal crisis on those served by our Catholic Charities.

We strongly believe that the reduction in protective services for children and vulnerable adults and the reduction in mental health services for more than 15,000 persons has placed at risk those who are least able to defend themselves, least able even to cry for help.

We strongly believe that cutbacks in public education put at risk the futures of an entire generation of Arizona's children.

Are there solutions to the fiscal crisis that will not further endanger these most vulnerable persons?

We believe there are.

We encourage you – the leaders of our State – to continue seeking these solutions in a collaborative and constructive way by asking the people and the private and public institutions of Arizona to step up with ideas and to step up with resources.

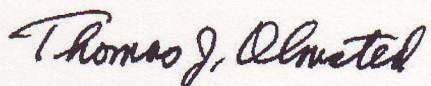
Ask the families of Arizona for their ideas and their help. Ask us and our Dioceses and all the faith communities in Arizona for their ideas and their help. Ask the private sector for its ideas and its help.

We have seen in recent weeks how entire communities in the upper Midwest worked endless hours to fill sandbags and to place them on the banks of flooding rivers to protect their homes and towns. It wasn't just elected officials and public safety workers. Everybody helped.

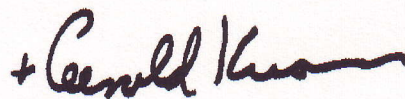
What sandbags can we fill together and place together to stop the flood of red ink in our State from causing further harm to those least able to help themselves?

In closing, we assure you again of our prayers.

Sincerely yours in Christ:

Handwritten signature of Thomas J. Olmsted in dark ink.

Most Rev. Thomas J. Olmsted
Bishop of Phoenix
Apostolic Administrator of Gallup

Handwritten signature of Gerald F. Kicanas in dark ink, preceded by a small cross symbol.

Most Rev. Gerald F. Kicanas
Bishop of Tucson

P.S. In addition to sharing these thoughts and concerns with you, we will share them with the Catholic people of our respective dioceses as well.