

*An Open Letter from New York's Religious Leaders to the
New York State Legislature and Governor David Paterson*

Dear Governor Paterson and Honorable Members of the Legislature:

As you know all too well, funding for the most basic public services, for recession-buffering social safety net programs, and for job-generating public investments are all at risk in the current fiscal crisis. As leaders of religious communities throughout the State of New York, we are committed to a fair solution to our state's budget deficit – one that protects rather than harms our state's most vulnerable people.

While times are tough, and critical choices must be made, massive cuts to education, healthcare, and other human services are simply unacceptable when more just and sensible solutions exist.

Every day, more households make devastating decisions about their priorities: paying their electric bill or buying their groceries, paying the rent or sending their kids to college. Many of the proposed budget cuts would jeopardize the health and wellbeing of our state's poorest residents. As you make the final deficit-cutting choices, the cuts being proposed would further endanger community healthcare institutions; would put our children at risk by underfunding our schools; and would hurt working families by increasing layoffs and diminishing access to the social services that provide a critical safety net for New Yorkers struggling to get by.

As religious leaders we stand with our communities in support of the poor and of working and middle class New Yorkers. We implore you to seek sensible solutions to our budget crisis that will help lift families up rather than tear them down. We urge you to seek new revenue sources to mitigate the most harmful impact of the cuts being proposed.

New York can implement a just and sensible policy package that will help set working families and New York State back on track. **Reasonable measures should include asking those with the most means in our state to help those with the least.** Equitable options should include asking the financial sector to help, as they have just benefited and recovered with taxpayer bail-out assistance; instituting new income tax brackets for millionaires; and closing tax loopholes that allow large, highly profitable corporations to avoid taxation. These sensible measures should significantly reduce the need for more public service cuts and even more job losses.

We hope that you will join the chorus of voices standing up to protect our communities, and work to bring fiscal fairness to working New Yorkers and fiscal stability to New York State.

Sincerely,

An Open Letter from New York's Religious Leaders to the New York State Legislature and Governor David Paterson

Rev. Dr. Ramond Rivera
Latino Pastoral Action Center
Bronx

Pastor Doris Johnson
The Holy Ghost Upper Room Filling Station Ministry
Queens

Deacon Irving Hicks
Brinkerhoff Action Association
Queens

Pastor Caesar Cabiness
Praise Tabernacle
Queens

Rev. Jose Torres
United Chaplains of New York
Bronx

Pastor Kevin Quarals
Whom So Ever Baptist Church
Bronx

Rev. Terry Lee
Byways and Hedges, Youth For Christ
Brooklyn

Pastor Wilfredo Milan
Crisis Intervention Ministry
Brooklyn

Pastor Elsa G. Milan
Crisis Intervention Ministry
Brooklyn

Rev. Kathy Layne
Staten Island Ministers' Alliance
Staten Island

Rev. Elvis Santiago
United Chaplains of New York State
Bronx

Pastor Robert Smith
Church of the Savior
Bronx

Pastor Anthony Davis
Church of the Redeemer
Bronx

Pastor Sinclair Samuel
Butler UMC
Bronx

Pastor Michelle White Hayes
Greater Faith Tabernacle
Bronx

Rabbi Keith Elijah Thompson
Bronx Mirical Tabernacle
Bronx

Rev. Jim Mulcahy
Metropolitan Community Church
Rochester

Rev. Myers
Emmanuel Baptist Church
Rochester

Pastor Clarence Lewis
New Hope Fellowship
Rochester

Rabbi Joe Mensch
Organization of West Side Temples
Manhattan

Rabbi Michael Feinberg
Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition
New York

Rev. Dr. Robert M. Waterman
Antioch Baptist Church
Brooklyn

Rev. Dr. Earl Kooperkamp
St. Mary's Episcopal Church
New York

Rev. Pat Bumgardner
Methodist Community Church

Rev. Theresa Lindsay

Bishop Ronnie Eggleston
Ephram Judah Intl. Ministries, Inc
Brooklyn

Rev. Dr. Mark V.C. Taylor
The Church of the Open Door

Fr. Joseph Franco
Sacred Heart Church
Bronx

Fr. Joseph Franco
St. Francis of Assisi
Bronx

Rev. Mike Grant
Church of God
Bronx

Rev. Delali Banza
Living Gospel Ministry
Bronx

Pastor Angel Ortiz
Living Gospel Ministry
Bronx

Rev. Franklin Simpson
Lutheran Church of the Resurrection
Bronx

Elder Cora Taitt
Highbridge Community Church
Bronx

Rev. Dr. Kwame Amvuh-Kuna
Emmanuel Presbyterian Church of God
Bronx

Rev. Albert Sutton
Friendly Baptist Church
Bronx

Pastora Virginia Molina
Centro Cristiano Cumplidores
Bronx

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Rev. Alfred A. Adames
Bethel Prayer Ministries International, Pastor
Bronx

Rev. Ramos
University Pentecostal Church
Bronx

Rev. Carlos Cady
Sinagoga Pentecostal Church
Bronx

Rev. Wenzell Jackson
Mount Hermon Baptist Church
Bronx

Imam Mousa Zeidy Wague
Masjid Dejaue
Bronx

Imam Bajaga
Islamic Cultural Center
Bronx

Rev. Earl Mckay
Church of God Prophecy
Bronx

Rev. Denise Pickett
Woodycrest United Methodist Church
Bronx

Rev. Joel Rivera
Latino Pastoral Action Center
Bronx

Rev. Granby Grand
Christian United Baptist Church
Bronx

Rev. Francia Aquino-Garcia
Iglesia Puerta Del Cielo
Bronx

Rev. Cirby Almonte
7th Trompeta Christian Church
Bronx

Rabbi Daniel Polish
Congregation Shir Chadash
Lagrange

Rev. Wade Wheelock
Unitarian Universalist Church of Canton
Canton

Rev. Derrick Boykin
Memorial Community Church of West Harrison, Pastor
West Harrison

Lois Griffin
First Unitarian-Universalist Society of Albany
Chair, Social Responsibility Council
Albany

Minister Maureen Thitchener
Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua
Canandaigua

Fr. Frederick Duncanson, MD

Rev. Sam Trumbore
First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany
Albany

Rev. Dr. Richard Gilbert
Interfaith Impact of NYS and Unitarian, President
Universalist Association, Coord.
St. Lawrence Dist.

Cass Shaw
Albany Presbytery, General Presbyter
Albany

Dr. Richard Propp, MD
B'nai Sholom Reform Congregation, Social Action Com,
Albany

Barbara Zaron
Faith and Hunger Network
Albany

Mary Lu Bowen
NYS Council of Churches, Exec. Director
Albany

Rev. Daniel Hahn
Lutheran Statewide Advocacy

Rev. Brooke Newell
Presbyteries of Albany, Advocacy Ministries Coord.

Rev. Casper Green
First Baptist Church
Glens Falls

Rev. Mark Hummel
Episcopal Diocese of New York
Social Concerns Commission, Chair

Rev. Steve Deckard
United Methodist, Minister
NY State of Churches Council, member

Rev. Joel Gibson
Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies,
Director of Faith Based Services
New York

Rev. Richard Witt
Rural Migrant Ministries

Rev. Michael Relyea
St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, Asst. Pastor
New York

Rev. Debra Jameson
FOCUS Churches of Albany
Albany

Rev. Vernon Victorson
First Lutheran Church, ELCA, Pastor
Albany

Rabbi Shpeen
Temple Beth Emeth

Rev. Dr. Charles Straut
Consultant in Ministry
Brooklyn

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Interim Bishop Susan Hassinger
United Methodist Church
Albany Episcopal Area

Rev. Alan Newton
American Baptist Churches of Rochester Genesee Region,
Executive Minister
Rochester

Dr. Roger Ellis
Granville United Methodist Church

Rev. Glenn Leupold
First Presbyterian Church, Co-Pastor

Carol Wrinn
United Methodist Church

Rev. Tom Davis
United Church of Christ
Saratoga Springs

Rev. John Miller
Evangelical Protestant United Church of Christ, Pastor
Capital Area Council of Churches, Exec. Director
Albany

Cristina Notaro
Mobilized Interfaith Coalition Against Hunger
Long Island

Misha Marvel, MSW
Coordinator, Capital Region Ecumenical Organization

Rev. Mark Marino
Connectional Ministries, Wyoming Annual Conference, Director
Endicott

Brian O'Shaughnessy
NYS Labor- Religion Coalition, Exec. Director

Rev. Stanley Skinner
Broome Central Chapel

Andreas Kriefall
Faith and Hunger Network

Rev. Dr. Luther Kriefall
Columbia University, Chaplain Emeritus

Robb Smith
Exec. Director, Interfaith Impact of NYS

Damaris McGuire
Exec. Director, NYS Episcopal Public Policy Network

Msgr. David Gallivan
Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church
Buffalo

Rev. Bruce McKay
Pilgrim-St. Luke United Church of Christ
Buffalo

Pastor Rosetta Swain
Sanctuary of Praise
Buffalo

Rev. Barbara Hulsing
Good Sheppard Community of Faith
Buffalo

Rev. Harvey Kelley
New Hope Baptist Church
Niagara Falls

Dr. William Wilkinson
Dansville Presbyterian Church
Rochester

Pastor Kevin Agee
Hopps Memorial CME Church
Syracuse

Pastor Craig Schaub
Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ
Syracuse