



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

February 11, 2013

The Honorable Chris Smith
US House of Representatives
2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Smith:

A few weeks ago I wrote to your office to call your attention to the sad situation of houses of worship that were severely damaged by Hurricane Sandy. At that time I could cite Catholic churches and Jewish synagogues who had been told that FEMA would not offer them grants to re-build their place of worship but only loans.

Today I learned that you plan to offer in Congress a bill that would offer houses of worship the same access to disaster relief as other community centers.

I write to thank you for doing this as well as to add my voice of support for just such a correction of a previous position that surely does not reflect either our traditions or our current realities. Houses of worship have been one of the first centers of response across Long Island. The Sunday after Sandy I visited the four parishes most damaged by the storm where I witnessed in parish halls without heat or electricity two signs of hope: faithful people worshipping and the same faithful people reaching out to one another to share food, clothing and other necessities even when their own homes had been destroyed.

To discriminate against houses of worship would be a mark of sectarianism that denies the generosity of the people who helped one another and narrows the American spirit to an arbitrary sectarianism. Please know that my parishioners, my priests and all the volunteers in our various outreach centers are one with me in support of your bill.

+ William Murphy
Bishop of Rockville Centre