Hi, I am Mike Bloomgren, an executive with a local tier automotive supplier. I have been asked to share my experiences with you, on job loss, down sizing, or right sizing – from the perspective of the boss or manager.

I am not a theologian, nor a counselor – I like many of you, have a family and try to do a good job providing for them: caring, feeding and setting a good example for my kids, and being a good husband and companion to my wife. I truly try to live as a good steward of all the gifts God has blessed me with -– and I struggle daily in trying to live out God's plan.

I have been blessed and privileged to have managed or supervised employees for nearly 25 years of my working career. I work conscientiously each day trying to do what is "right", guided by my Catholic upbringing, and try not to compromise my sense of morality for the sake of "business".

I am sure many of your days, like mine, are challenging. Juggling the duties of my job; growing business, hiring, training, meeting with customers, shipping product, etc. is complicated, and at the same time, very fulfilling and rewarding. Unfortunately, I have also had the experience of going thru tough, very tough business conditions – of needing to let people go to try and stay in business. This laying off, right sizing, down sizing, no matter what you call it, totally impacts a person and his or her family. It completely changes their lives…..most often through no fault of their own. It is a terrible experience for everyone involved – business is tough, and demanding.

When business conditions get to this point it is gut wrenching. There are no other words to describe the feeling – I do not sleep, I am restless for days – searching for alternatives to make things work so no one has to lose their job. When finding no alternative, then I have to develop the plan of when, how deep and who will be losing their jobs. It is my job to select by name the employees to be impacted. Yes, this is gut wrenching. I have had a hand in hiring many of these people, and have become close business associates with them. Others I see at my kids sporting events. And some I even sit next to in the pew at church on Sunday. I find myself feeling guilty and second guessing myself. Could I have done something different that would have prevented this? I pray a lot during this time. I vent to God, and I pound my car steering wheel. I ask for His guidance – what would He do? The parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30…..helps some, but only some. We are all expected to give a return on what the Lord has given us. It reminds me that Jesus mentions and recognizes bosses…and a return of profit is expected for effort/work. But there is still the overriding guilt from thinking that there was a failure on my part, as the boss, that led to this situation…it is a process that I turn back again to prayer, and try to leave in God's hands……

So, in tough business conditions like now…what have I done? Besides strapping on the typical male macho exterior: don't let emotions show, or talk about feelings – put on that game face….. As a manager, I remind myself that I have a responsibility for the entire organization, group or department – that the group survival comes before an individual. For it is only thru the group surviving that we have a chance to hire and grow again. But

that each individual MUST be dealt with respectfully, honestly and with dignity. I have also found that frequent and open communication, helps the situation. No one likes surprises. I would encourage the sharing of the company or departments business conditions with your employees often and truthfully. As well as offering help in any way possible in finding new employment – either thru outplacement assistance, or thru solid recommendations to new employers.

I have also found that being direct and to the point with each person, in regards to what is being done, and why – seems to be appreciated. An email, memo or some other impersonal way of delivering the terrible news is cowardly. Dealing with a person face to face at least gives me the chance to treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve. It allows me to offer some form of compassion and also gives them the opportunity to voice their feelings of frustration, anger or helplessness at the person directly responsible.

As I work thru this process, I also remind myself that I have the responsibility of continuing to lead the group or team that is left. These survivors are also impacted by a layoff. Most likely, they will have the immediacy of additional work to do, but they too, may feel guilty as to why not me? Or, they may feel anxious and wonder if they will be next. As their manager, I recognize that this is the yoke that I have the privilege to carry and it is my responsibility to do my best to help them thru this time by encouraging them and finding a way to instill in them confidence and hope that better days are ahead. Being a manager or leader is not easy. I pray every day for my Lord's guidance that I do my best, and try to follow His lead.

I would like to thank Fr Mike and the staff of St Joseph for their willingness to try and reach out to those of us impacted by today's economy. May God help us thru these times. I truly believe the Lord knows what we need before we ask. I just wish He would make it less painful and more clear at times.

May God Bless our Parish.