



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
of COLUMBUS
OFFICE *of the* BISHOP

December 23, 2025

My Dear Friends in Christ,

Recent days have seen an increase in immigration enforcement in the Diocese of Columbus, causing an increase in fear and feelings of anxiety in our immigrant communities. The increased presence of federal agents in proximity to our churches and schools is creating an atmosphere of fear rather than security and peace, which we all desire.

Having monitored the situation, in consultation with the pastors of these communities, and having witnessed the drama of these past days personally, I hereby dispense, in accordance with canon 1247, from the obligation to attend Holy Mass, all those persons who reasonably fear being detained, even those with proper legal documentation, who fear separation from their families, or experience intimidation because of their status or ethnic background. This dispensation will last through the Christmas Season, which ends with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on January 11, 2026.

I strongly encourage spiritual practices during this time, including joining live-streamed Masses, making spiritual communion, praying the family rosary, meditating on the Nativity scene, and other activities of popular piety. The churches will remain open and sacramental services will be available. You are welcome, but I encourage you to exercise prudence in attending such services. Our churches should be beacons of light and hope, where people can find refuge, forgiveness and peace, and where everyone – of every race, tribe, and nation – is welcome. I encourage those who can attend Mass to pray for those who cannot attend Mass.

If you cannot attend Mass and you, or a loved one, are in need of pastoral and sacramental care, including the sacraments of penance, anointing of the sick or Holy Communion, please contact your pastors, who are generously willing to visit your homes to bring Christ to you. God will not abandon you, nor will we. He loves you. Your bishop and your priests love you. We want to be with you and you with us!

To those who must enforce the law, I recognize that you must do your job and work to protect the people of our community; nevertheless, I appeal to your conscience: temper justice with mercy and compassion. Do not unnecessarily separate families at Christmas time. The Jubilee Year is intended to be a year of grace and mercy; allow families to experience the peace of Christmas. I am grateful for your efforts that target the most violent and dangerous threats to our community. People deserve to live in peace and tranquility. Be architects of peace.

To the Christian faithful of the Diocese, the fear that has gripped our communities has been accompanied by a drastic drop in Mass attendance and participation in Advent devotions. People are too afraid to go to church. These same individuals are also too afraid to go to work, which will lead to an economic crisis for families and shortages of the basic necessities of life, including food. I appeal to you for a renewed sense of generosity and solidarity, especially at Christmastime.

As Pilgrims of Hope, together we are on a journey that leads to our true homeland, which is heaven. May the Mother of God and Saint Joseph, who took step after step, toward Bethlehem and who knew the pain of hearing that “there was no room at the inn” but who carried the Life and Hope of the world with them, watch over you and protect you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandes
Bishop of Columbus