



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
of COLUMBUS
OFFICE *of the* BISHOP

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

I want to take a moment to thank the faithful of the Diocese of Columbus for their support of the foreign-born priests and religious who labor in the Diocese. Yesterday, we learned that an Interim Final Rule affecting priests and religious who hold R-1 visas was issued. This rule change means that they will no longer need to return to their country of origin for an entire year but instead will need to return for only one week if the R-1 visa expires.

We calculated that 21 priests and 13 sisters, who hold R-1 visas and are working in the Diocese, would have been affected, causing a disruption to the life of the Diocese. In the past year, one priest and three religious were forced to leave the Diocese. This rule change provides some much-needed relief! We take comfort in knowing that sacramental and pastoral care will not be disrupted in our parishes, schools, hospitals, and prison ministries.

At the same time, I encourage all of the faithful to press for a permanent legislative fix and to support the Religious Workforce Protection Act. I want to thank Congressman Mike Carey, who represents the greater Columbus metro area, for his support and action within the House of Representatives. I appreciate his willingness to meet with me and his help in introducing this legislation in the House. He listened attentively to our concerns and showed initiative in seeking a constructive solution.

I also want to thank Congressman Jim Jordan for his willingness to hear the concerns that surround this important legislation and how it would impact the Catholic faith community.

I was able to personally speak to Senator Bernie Moreno about the vital importance of this issue and of the legislation for the faithful across not only Ohio but our country, allowing our priests and religious to continue to serve the people of God through their ministries. Senator Moreno and I exchanged several calls and messages, and he intervened personally to work for the rule change that was issued yesterday.

I am deeply grateful for the commitment these representatives and others have made and continue to make so that our communities may continue to thrive with the assistance of missionary priests and religious.

The impact of our international priests and religious across the United States is pivotal in helping us build a civilization of love, assisting in the growth of the virtues of solidarity and fraternity, and providing the sacramental and pastoral needs of our people, an increasingly diverse group from around the world.

I urge you to continue to push for the passage of the Religious Workforce Protection Act with your representatives and ask for your continued prayers for all clergy and religious throughout our diocese and around the world, while offering prayers of gratitude for our civic leaders and for our priests and religious who continue to serve the members of our community.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandes
Bishop of Columbus