



DIOCESE OF FALL RIVER
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BISHOP VOICES CONCERN ON IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

FALL RIVER — Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., has issued the following statement expressing his concerns on immigration enforcement.

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35)

A foundational teaching of our Catholic faith makes clear that every person from conception to natural death is made in the image and likeness of God and, as such, deserves to be treated with dignity. It is through this lens that we are called to reflect not only on our own actions but also on those of our society including our government.

In its first weeks, the new Administration in Washington, D.C. has prioritized immigration enforcement through new orders, and an emphasis on the need for mass deportations.

To be clear, our government has the responsibility to secure our borders and to keep its citizens safe. As Bishop Mark Sietz of El Paso, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Migration wrote last week, “Church teaching recognizes a country’s right and responsibility to promote public order, safety, and security through well-regulated borders and just limits on immigration.”

At the same time, as the Administration moves forward with immigration enforcement it is imperative that it proceeds in a humane way, with respect for the law, and with respect for the dignity of all concerned. As Christians, we must be committed to ensuring this. Again, to echo Bishop Sietz, “...we cannot abide injustice.”

In concluding his 1987 papal trip to the United States, Pope John Paul II said. “...America, your deepest identity and truest character as a nation is revealed in the position you take towards the human person.”

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One new executive order authorizes immigration officials to enter schools, healthcare facilities, and churches to conduct arrests. This has caused much fear and anxiety in our communities among citizens and immigrants alike. Some understandably wonder if it is no longer safe to pray in our churches or send their children to our schools to learn. Churches are sacred places, long regarded as a safe refuge where anyone can go to seek God's comfort and strength. It is my hope and prayer that the protection once afforded our churches, and other special places is not ripped away in the current climate.

Earlier this year, speaking of the need to balance migration governance with regard for human rights and dignity, Pope Francis said, "We are quick to forget we are dealing with people with names and faces."

The Catholic Church in the U.S. has long welcomed newcomers and provided them with pastoral care and other assistance. I am grateful that this continues today in the Diocese of Fall River through our parishes, schools, ministries, and especially Catholic Charities' immigration services.

I join many of my brother bishops who are calling for bipartisan, comprehensive, and effective immigration reform that reflects Gospel values. I invite our faithful and all people of goodwill to join me in praying for this. Please also remember the immigrants, refugees, and others among us in search of a safe place to call home, and our country, which has long been a beacon of hope and welcome.