



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP  
DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

April 7, 2017

My Dear Brothers in Christ,

Many of you have reached out and expressed concern about recent executive orders related to immigration as well as reports of increased enforcement efforts by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). I write to express my support for all our most vulnerable brothers and sisters living in fear and to share with you the resources available to help those in need.

Our diocese must stand together at this time to make clear that we support the dignity of every person without regard to immigration status. We are available to offer a ministry of accompaniment to all those in need of assistance – from meeting immediate needs such as feeding the hungry to an ongoing program supporting immigrants with legal concerns. Catholic Charities will host two upcoming “Know Your Rights” sessions: at Blessed Sacrament Parish on May 16 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. a second session in Nashua that will be announced soon. For those parishes and individuals interested in doing more, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) has developed a resource on discerning how to welcome your neighbor that you may review by [clicking here](#).

There is some confusion, however, about designating our churches as “sanctuary” churches. Some use this term and mean what I have described above – a welcoming community ready to offer immediate aid to anyone in need. In these works, of course, we will always be involved. But others use this term “sanctuary” to refer to churches that will allow individuals in fear of deportation to *live* in the church. We have not designated our churches as “sanctuary” churches in this sense of the word because it creates a false hope to tell individuals living in fear that we can protect them from law enforcement actions. “Sanctuary” is not a designation recognized by law and provides no such legal protection. Instead, immigration law imposes criminal penalties and fines on anyone who conceals, harbors, or shields from detection, in any place, an alien who has come to, entered, or remains in the United States in violation of the law. The CLINIC resource highlighted above explains some of the potential consequences of this type of sanctuary effort, and they are not minimal.

It also may be helpful to remember that diocesan policy requires my approval before anyone may live in any Church property, even if rent is not charged.

I stand with my brother bishops, through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in calling for comprehensive and compassionate reform of our immigration system. We will continue to advocate for this goal; until that day, however, we must stand in solidarity with those who live in the shadows, listening to their needs and discerning the most appropriate response. The Immigration and Refugee Services Office of Catholic Charities New Hampshire is available to answer your questions and assist you and may be reached at 603-663-0260.

As we approach Holy Week and the Passion of our Lord, we are reminded of those who accompanied Him on the Way of the Cross: Veronica, who wiped his brow in a brief moment of rest; Simon of Cyrene, who helped lighten his load for a short time along the way; and of course, Mary, His mother and ours, who is the model of accompaniment through the sufferings of Good Friday in the hope of Easter morning. May they serve as our models as we seek to make our churches welcoming spaces and provide assistance to all those in need.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Libasci". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Peter A. Libasci, D.D.  
Bishop of Manchester