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November 25, 2026

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The season of Advent is upon us. These days provide us with an opportunity to seek opportunities in gentle, hope-filled silence to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, who is Emmanuel, God with us. At the same time, we hold in prayer those who come to these weeks carrying heavy hearts. Violence and conflict continue to wound the human family. In our Nation and here in our Commonwealth, division too often hardens into distrust and anger. Closer to home, many among us are grieving someone they love, anxious about the future, struggling with burdens known only to them, or simply longing for a little peace. Advent meets us precisely there.

Each week, as we gather around the Advent wreath, we light another candle. At first, one small flame flickers against the darkness. Then another is lit, and another, until slowly and quietly the light grows. What a beautiful image for our lives of faith. In my pastoral vision, *Stir into Flame*, I reflected on Saint Paul's words to Timothy: *"Stir into flame the gift of God."* Through Baptism, each of us has been illuminated by Christ and given gifts of the Holy Spirit for the good of His Church and our world. Perhaps this Advent, the growing light of the wreath can remind us to stir those gifts into flame once again. That invitation seems especially urgent this Advent.

When the darkness of the world discourages us, Christ invites us to stir into flame the gift of hope. When neighbors are forgotten, the poor overlooked, the human dignity of the migrant diminished, ignite the flame of mercy. When the suffering around us seems overwhelming, the Gospel challenges us to let the love of Christ burn more brightly within us. We need not illuminate the whole world by ourselves. We need only allow Christ to light the place where we are. That light can begin with patience toward someone who tries us, forgiveness after an estrangement, a visit to someone who is lonely, generosity toward a family in need, or a word of kindness where bitterness has taken root. This is how the light of Christ spreads, one heart encountering another.

So, as you light the candles of your Advent wreath this year, I invite you to pause for a moment. Bring before the Lord those places in your life and in our world that seem darkest, and ask: Lord, where are You asking me to carry Your light? As the Advent wreath grows brighter each week, may the light of Christ also grow brighter within us. May the Holy Spirit stir into flame our faith, renew our hope, and deepen our love for one another. And when at last we celebrate Christmas, may we welcome the Christ Child with hearts made ready for Him. May the peace of that holy night enter your homes, comfort those who are grieving or alone, strengthen those who are carrying heavy burdens, and fill your families with the joy that comes from knowing that *God is with us.* May the light of God's gifts within us become a beacon of love and mercy.

Please know that I will remember you and your loved ones in my prayers and at Mass during these holy days. I wish you and your families a blessed Advent and, when Christmas comes, a joyful and peace-filled celebration of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Timothy C. Senior

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg