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Cuernavaca, Mexico — December 6, 2019

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A bullet hole in the town hall of Villa Union, Mexico, is seen near a sculpture of Jesus Dec. 2, 2019. To the south, the Diocese of Cuernavaca has suspended evening Masses due to insecurity in the city and surrounding state of Morelos, a reflection of

the violence raging in parts of Mexico and its impact on the Catholic Church. (CNS/Reuters/Daniel Becerril)

The Diocese of Cuernavaca has suspended evening Masses due to insecurity in the city and surrounding state of Morelos, a reflection of the violence raging in parts of Mexico and its impact on the Catholic Church.

Bishop Ramon Castro Castro of Cuernavaca said church services would not be celebrated after dark because people in the region just south of Mexico City did not want to venture out of their homes after dark.

"These are situations where people are scared. It's a fear that paralyzes them," Castro told local media Dec. 4, according to the newspaper El Universal.

"There are many people I know who have nothing to do with organized crime, but find themselves affected by this violence and have changed their lifestyle," he said, adding church attendance is the southern and eastern parts of Morelos — a small state that borders the national capital — has dropped due to insecurity.

The bishop also said he had registered four cases of extortion committed against women religious in the diocese.

Mexico has had high rates of violence and homicide over the past 13 years as the country launched a crackdown on drug cartels and organized crime.

The murder rate reached a record level in 2018, and the homicide rate is expected to race past that mark in 2019, with 36,000 homicides projected. The country registered its bloodiest day of the year Dec. 1, with 128 homicides. The death toll included 21 in the northern state of Coahuila, near the Texas border, where dozens of gunmen attacked a city hall.

Castro has come under fire from state and local authorities for denouncing corruption and convening an annual peace march in Cuernavaca, once a popular weekend destination for Mexico City residents.

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