

## **A LESSON FROM THE PAST**

In a recent issue of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Peter Alotoic started his article with the words: “Hazleton and Altoona ... send your huddled masses to Pittsburgh!” He brings out the fact that immigrants “bring strong family values, rich cultural traditions and a hard work ethic,” as they have in the past. Alotoic concludes with these words: “Like Hazleton and Altoona, we in Pittsburgh have experienced steady population loss for far too long. But, unlike those places, we recognize that new immigrants are our only hope for the future, and we will welcome you with open arms.”

Allow me to set aside for the moment the legal issue and the need for reforming our immigration laws. As for the Christian position relative to the needy regardless of their status, you will find a clarification of that elsewhere in *The Catholic Register* as well as on our *Website*, and, hopefully, in your *parish bulletin*.

Peter Alotoic’s article warns that future undocumented immigrants coming into a city are not the only ones targeted by the recent ordinances in the two cities (intentionally or unintentionally). Those who have been with us for a few years and contributing well to our economy are, as well. Furthermore, documented immigrants will be among those who suffer the effects, due to our propensity to profile. The point is that our nation has been built on the backs of persons such as these, who are now being told that they are not welcome.

A week ago Sunday, I celebrated Mass with the Faithful of Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish in Windber, observing their 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a community of faith. That church was established as the worship site for Slovak immigrants who came to work in the coal mines. They worked jobs that others preferred not to work; and, they did them well. My father was one of them. Bethlehem Steel, experiencing the benefit of such a work ethic, has built one of its plants in the Republic of Slovakia. That has become their most profitable mill in the world. The same story can be told about other nationalities.

I am praying that Interstate 99 will be completed during my lifetime. It will be a very important connector between two major thoroughfares, Interstate 80 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike. As such, it will draw new industries looking for communities that will be welcoming to a potential workforce. They will shun those areas that are not.

The United States was founded by immigrants and has continued to benefit from the contributions of immigrants. A good immigration legislation reform would continue to allow such contributions through a more friendly and, yet, legal process. However, that is the purview of our federal government. We should be spending our time and energy on making the communities of our area welcoming, though safe. This will not only reflect the charity that most of the religions espouse, but will be a healthy choice for the future well-being of our cities. I applaud Peter Alotoic for his insight, succinctness, and sense of history.