

Immigration stranglehold causing inhumane consequences

Letter sent July 12 to US senators, representatives; also forwarded to President Trump

We recently celebrated Independence Day. Like our brothers and sisters of every race and creed, American Catholics gave thanks to God for the birth of our nation and the freedoms that this provides to each of us as its citizens. Hopefully you enjoyed the holiday in the company of family and friends. I pray that you took the time to give thanks for that company; those relatives by blood or adoption, and friends that surround you, sharing stories and offering encouragement, praise, and support. I am also certain that the loyalty and love you feel for them would motivate you to move them to a safer place if they were in danger. If necessary, you might even risk your life for them.

I write today, in a land of freedom and almost unlimited opportunity, to call your attention to the fact that there are people, each one a child of God, who by our common relationship with the Lord are our brothers and sisters who need our help. Many of these people, a number of whom are children, are fleeing for their lives after experiencing terrorism and hardship in their home countries. They are looking for safety, shelter, comfort, and peace for themselves and their families. They are knocking at our door. Sadly, their knocks have gone unanswered. What's worse? We have locked them out. I think here of the Gospel story of the rich man who ignored the needs of Lazarus who was sitting on his doorstep. It didn't end well for the rich man in the final judgment (see Luke 16:19-31).

I sometimes wonder what the Diocese of Greensburg would look like today if the doors had been locked to impoverished and persecuted immigrants who came to the United States at the turn of the 20th century looking for safety and a better way of life. Italian, Polish, Slovak, German and Irish parishes were formed to help them feel welcomed and assimilated into the American experience. Their arrival and unfettered settlement in and around Southwestern Pennsylvania are the very



JENNIFER MIELE THE CATHOLIC ACCENT

Bishop Edward C. Malesic leads a prayer in the state House in Harrisburg June 10.

foundation of the wide variety of cultures and ethnic flavors that has given vibrancy and life to our Western Pennsylvania Communities for well over 100 years.

In the Diocese of Greensburg, we still rely on adequate immigration laws to allow us to do the work of the Church and keep it alive and well. Today, nearly a third of our pastors or parochial vicars are missionary priests from the Philippines and other countries. Their work is invaluable to the ministries of the 78 parishes in Westmoreland, Indiana, Fayette and Armstrong Counties providing spiritual support to nearly 140,000 Catholics. We have excellent relations with the United States Immigration Department, but the bureaucratic red tape is often so thick that each successful working visa for a priest who has guaranteed work here manages to put a significant strain on the resources of two Diocesan departments for months. Often, the delays caused by our inefficient system of immigration prevent us from serving the needs of our parishes as best as we can with the help of these international priests. With that being said, the inconveniences to us are nothing compared with the terror that many poor and vulnerable children and families face when they approach our borders from the south.

Make no mistake, I support securing borders to keep us from harm. This is both a right and an obligation of every nation. But the sad state of affairs that exists currently has made it nearly impossible, in

some instances, for us to carry out our call from Jesus to welcome strangers and fulfill the commandment of love: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). Our currently broken immigration system seems resistant to a solution, not because of lack of will by the people of our nation, but because of stale-mated political battles by men and women in our nation's leadership.

I cannot tell you how critical this issue is for me as a follower of Jesus Christ, and for many others like me. I believe the Lord will judge us at the end of our days on the basis of how we treated our brothers and sisters during our time on earth. As Jesus told us, "Whatever you did not do for one of these least brothers of mine, you did not do for me" (Matthew 25:40). In this instance, we cannot be governed by fear. I implore you to make good decisions about keeping us safe at our border and then make equally good decisions to open the path to legitimate immigration that allows us to grow as a country, so that we can continue to reap the benefits of good and hardworking people who have the desire to call our country their home too, just like my immigrant grandparents did many years ago.

Back in 1940 President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "Human kindness has never weakened the stamina or softened the fiber of a free people. A nation does not have to be cruel in order to be tough. The vigorous expression of our American community spirit is

truly important. The ancient injunction to love thy neighbor as thyself is still the force that animates our faith — a faith that we are determined shall live and conquer in a world poisoned by hatred and ravaged by war."

I was deeply moved by the June Op/Ed in *The Hill*, written by Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, Archbishop José H. Gomez and Bishop Joe S. Vásquez. I encourage you to read it in its entirety. Here are some excerpts:

We mourn the deaths of 23-month-old Angie Valeria and her father, Oscar Martinez, who died on Monday while fleeing El Salvador in search of safety in the United States. This young family embarked on a journey of over 1,400 miles, through some of the most dangerous parts of the world, which ended with a father paying the ultimate price — his life — to keep his daughter from harm's way. Angie was still scared after she was left safely on the river bank and she jumped back in the water to be with her dad, her security.

We all know the dangers associated with migrating from the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The situation is so dire in these countries due to gang violence, corrupt governments, and poverty that people are willing to risk their lives to walk through Central America and Mexico in the hope for asylum in the United States.

For the second straight summer, asylum seekers, most of them children and families, are caught in the middle of a stale-mated political battle as they endure the brunt of life-altering scenarios and poor conditions.

This year, many are forced to remain in Mexico as they risk dangers on the border to await their uncertain future. Those who are able to cross the border are put in facilities with reported conditions that are substandard for a facility

run by the United States Government.

Congress has, for years, been unable to find the solution so that we can be a nation that welcomes and embraces the immigrant. It is imperative that the administration and Congress come up with a solution to these tragic realities and pass a comprehensive immigration reform plan that will include immediate humanitarian relief.

I pray that you will use your position as an elected Senator who represents the people of Pennsylvania.

Senators, I understand that both of you represent people of varying opinions on this matter in your elected position. I am asking you to represent me and those people of good will and faith who share my beliefs to the best of your ability: to protect the vulnerable, to welcome the stranger, to secure our borders, to tend to the needs of immigrant children and families no matter their home of origin, and to welcome those from dangerous and impoverished countries who have risked life and limb in the hopes of finding the particular brand of American hospitality and care that sets us apart from other nations. Please work as hard as you can to create and support legislation that releases the unnecessary stranglehold on immigration to the United States that has caused tragic and inhumane consequences.

May God bless America. But, also, may we use God's blessings to love those who are most in need.

I will continue to ask the faithful of the Diocese of Greensburg to pray for you and all our elected officials as you work for our common good.

Sincerely,

+ Edward C. Malesic

The Most Reverend
Edward C. Malesic, JCL
Bishop of Greensburg

President
Donald
Trump



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Casey Jr.



U.S. Sen.
Patrick "Pat"
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