

Sunday July 17, 2016
EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Immigrants

In the paper the other day, there was a two page advertisement from the Carnegie Corporation listing all the honorees of their Great Immigrant Initiative from the past decade, 2006-2016. I almost skipped over it, quickly turning the pages, but something caught my eye, perhaps the individual photos of so many accomplished persons in almost every endeavor of American life: science, medicine technology, business, military, government, the arts, sports, academia, media, culinary, and not-for-profits. Each of the persons listed was an immigrant, a person from another country who has helped make America great.

Andrew Carnegie, himself an immigrant, was the obvious inspiration of his company's Great Immigrants Initiative, but the program also was intended to "salute the contributions of the millions of other immigrants, like him, who have made and continue to make our nation strong and vibrant." The Initiative borrowed from our national motto "E Pluribus Unum" – "Out of Many, One" – to affirm its belief in diversity as a patriotic motive, for immigrants are a central part of our country's history. Immigrants, despite the current clamor, have always been the key to our nation's progress and success.

Think of some famous immigrants, e.g., the founder of Google, Sergey Brin, a Russian; the founder of eBay, Pierre Omidyar, a French immigrant; the founder of Yahoo, Jerry Yang, an immigrant from Taiwan. Their companies, along with other popular name brands, helped make the United States the capital of modern technology. In fact, some of the beset-known American products, Colgate, Kraft, Sara Lee, DuPont, and Procter & Gamble, were all started by immigrants. So were U.S. Steel and Pfizer, Nordstrom and Kohl's. According to Forbes Magazine, 25% of high-tech companies founded in the United States between 1995 and 2005 were led by an immigrant founder. Immigrants founded half of the top start-up companies in America. All of these companies provided jobs and health and stock benefits to countless individuals and families.

Immigrants work in agriculture, restaurants, nursing homes, motels and construction. They may be more ordinary than the recipients of the Carnegie awards but they still are, in my view, exceptional. The American Church, furthermore, has always relied on immigrants. The Vatican considered the United States a missionary country even into the 1950s. I am the first non-immigrant pastor at St. Timothy's. The Irish, the Italians, the Germans, and the Polish are simply being replaced by Mexicans, Indians, and Africans because there never have been enough priests to serve the American Church. Immigrants, like Mother Cabrini, founded religious orders here to staff Catholic hospitals and schools. It is delusional, therefore, to imagine that we can succeed without immigrants or that we can get rid of them. Nor did they come merely for their own personal advantage. Their presence and accomplishments have enriched our society. It is this point which is missing in our national discussion nowadays.