The Slovak Catholic Federation

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The Slovak immigrant community in the United States was nearing the peak of its existence in 1911. Parishes were still being organized and adjustments to the American experience of Church were adapted. The need for parochial schools in Slovak parishes became apparent. Slovak Americans longed for religious communities of men and women who would evangelize in the best traditions of our Cyrilic-Methodian heritage of Faith. While the primary concern was the needs of the Slovak Catholics in the United States, a unifying organization was necessary to promote works which would assist the Church in Slovakia.

By 1911, the major Slovak Catholic fraternal societies had already been established and over three hundred Roman Catholic parishes were flourishing in the United States. The need to unify on behalf of pastoral service was uppermost in the minds of the clergy and laity alike. Their pioneering efforts gave birth to a wonderful organization which was unique in that clergy and laity collaborated in promoting the work of the Church. Such cooperation and harmony had always been a trait of Slovaks prefiguring the Second Vatican Council model of the Church.

On February 22, 1911, thirty-eight Slovak priests and more than two hundred of the laity under the direction of the Reverend Jozef Murgaš gathered in Sacred Heart Church in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, to organize the Slovak Catholic Federation, which would serve as a unifying bond among Slovak Catholics and their institutions here in America. Also present at the founding were two members of American hierarchy, namely the Most Reverend Michael J. Hoban, bishop of Scranton, and the Most Reverend Jozef M. Koudelka, then auxiliary bishop of Cleveland who was later named bishop of Superior. Bishop Koudelka, a Czech, who had been active in pastoral ministry among the Slovaks in the United States. The Reverend John Porubský, a prolific writer and pastor of Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish in Binghamton, New York, was elected the first president. The Federation was incorporated on December 30, 1912, when His Honor, Judge S.J. Strauss of the Court of Common Please of Luzerne County in Pennsylvania, approved the Charter.

Among the first projects of the Federation was to give support to the recently established Congregation of the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius and to promote activities for youth. It also advanced the work of the Vincentian Sisters of Charity and the School Sisters of Saint Francis who had recently arrived in the United States to begin their educational apostolate among Slovak immigrants.

When the “Pittsburgh Agreement” was signed on May 30, 1918, to guarantee the rights of the Slovaks in the newly proposed Czecho-Slovak Republic, the president of the Federation, the Reverend John J. Kubášek of Yonkers, New York, was invited to sign the document on behalf of the Slovak Catholics in America. Father Kubášek organized a meeting of priests with General Milan R. Štefánik in New York City to discuss the position of the Church in the newly proposed common state of the Czechs and the Slovaks. The Federation’s concerns were addressed to the new government of the Czecho-Slovakia in 1919 after Prague began an anti-clerical campaign.

Following World War I, the Federation established its own official publication, Dobrý Pastier (The Good Shepherd) whose first editor was the Reverend Monsignor Steven J. Krasula, P.A., of New York City. Over the years it continued to be a monthly, and more recently, an annual publication.

The delegates of the 1921 convention met in Chicago and the Constitution and By-Laws of the Federation were adopted. They were formally approved on July 4, 1921 by His Eminence, George W. Cardinal Mundelein, on behalf of the American bishops. On July 7 of that year, the Most Reverend Joseph
Scroomb's, Archbishop of Cleveland, approved the Federation's affiliation with the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the forerunner of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In affiliating with the NCWC, the Federation launched various drives to raise funds for refugees following both the First and Second World Wars.

In the 1920's, other fund-raising activities were initiated under the title Matěěka Školšká (educational fund drives). Monies donated enabled the Federation to sponsor the Franciscan Friars in their establishment of an order in the United States. Financial support was also given to the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Andrew Svorad in Cleveland, Ohio; the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Danville, Pennsylvania; and the School Sisters of Saint Francis in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to establish institutions of higher education.

During the Holy Year of 1925, the Federation organized a pilgrimage to Rome. It was the first pilgrimage of American Slovaks to the Eternal City. The work of the organization continued to flourish and chapters were established in many Slovak parishes with districts or regions serving to coordinate their work on a regional basis. The Eastern Region promoted love for Cyrilo-Methodian faith traditions by hosting an annual pilgrimage around the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius. Religious books and pamphlets were published to aid the spiritual needs of Slovak Catholics. The other regions of the Federation, namely the Cleveland Region and the Western Region, hosted other religious programs to encourage interest in the work of the organization.

Following the Second World War, more than $300,000 was raised for Slovak refugees by the Slovak Catholic Federation. The Reverend Monsignor Joseph A. Kushner of Donora, Pennsylvania, became president at the thirty-second convention in 1949.

During the Holy Year of 1950, the Federation again sponsored a pilgrimage to Rome. When its leaders found the grave of Saint Cyril at the Basilica of Saint Clement in need of restoration, the Federation raised funds to restore the altar over the grave in the basilica. On June 5, 1952, the new altar was solemnly blessed and dedicated. The inscription on the altar translated from the Latin read, "Built by the sons and daughters of the Slovak nation." When the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception was built in Washington, D.C., the Federation's Eastern Region raised funds to erect statues of Saints Cyril and Methodius there.

In the 1950's, the Federation faced its greatest challenge when the communist government of Czecho-Slovakia began its persecution of the Church. Funds were raised to support the work of the Pontifical Nepomucene College in Rome. The need for a Slovak seminary in Rome was evident and such a project would need the strong support of the Slovak Catholic community in the United States since the faithful in Slovakia were hampered in their effort due to communist domination. The Reverend Monsignor Clement M. Mlynarovič of Valparaiso, Indiana, a prolific writer and author, served as president during the challenging years in the 1950's and early 1960's. Providence would have it that Monsignor Mlynarovič's new bishop would be the pastor of Holy Trinity Slovak Parish in Gary, Indiana, the Reverend Monsignor Andrew G. Grutka. With Bishop Grutka's episcopal ordination in 1957, a new chapter in the life of the Slovak Catholic Federation would begin.

At a public audience at Castel Gandolfo in 1958, His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, acknowledged the work of the Federation in assisting Slovak seminaries. Both His Eminence, Joseph Cardinal Pizzardo, and His Eminence, Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, asked the Federation to continue its assistance to Slovak seminaries at the Nepomucene College and to promote the construction of the proposed Slovak institute of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Rome. The Federation, under the leadership of Bishop Grutka who became its episcopal moderator, inaugurated a drive to raise funds for the new Slovak Institute which would include a seminary and publishing house.
Under Monsignor Mlynarovič’s capable leadership, the Federation responded with its full support for the Slovak Institute project. With Bishop Grutka as chairperson of the fund-raising drive, American Catholics also responded with traditional generosity and concern for the spiritual needs of Slovaks in their ancestral homeland. The Benedictine Abbey of Saint Andrew in Cleveland contributed $50,000 for this project. Its superior, Abbot Theodore G. Kojis, OSB, and his successors, Abbot Jerome M. Koval and Abbot Roger W. Gries, have given strong support over the years to the work of the Slovak Catholic Federation. The Slovak fraternal societies, affiliated with the Federation, followed suit and raised the initial funds needed for the project. The First Catholic Slovak Union of the USA and Canada was the first to respond followed by the Slovak Catholic Sokol; the First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association; and finally, the Ladies Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union. The various regions of the Federation hosted pilgrimages and raised funds for the new Slovak Institute.

During these years, two Slovak priests traveled from Rome to promote the need for the Slovak Institute among our parishes and organizations. The late Reverend Monsignor Štefan Nahálka, who was to become the first rector of the Slovak Institute, and the Reverend Monsignor Jozef Tomko, made frequent visits to the United States to solicit support for the project and began their association with the Federation.

On September 15, 1963, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, patroness of Slovakia, the Slovak Institute of Saints Cyril and Methodius became a reality when it was solemnly blessed and dedicated by His Eminence, Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, Dean of the College of Cardinals, in the presence of a large delegation of Catholics from America. It was a fitting event to conclude the observance of the eleventh centenary year of the evangelization of Saints Cyril and Methodius among the Slovaks. During a special papal audience with the group led by the Most Reverend Andrew G. Grutka and the Reverend Monsignor Mlynarovič, His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, lauded the work of the Slovak Catholics in America under the banner of the Slovak Catholic Federation and prayed that the new Slovak Institute would be the spiritual center of the Slovak nation in the Eternal City.

Through the continued generous support of the Federation, the work of the Slovak Institute blossomed and flowered providing much needed religious books for the faithful in Slovakia. Over the years, more than three million religious books would be published by the Slovak Institute and distributed to Slovaks both in Slovakia and outside as well. Following the dedication of the Slovak Institute in Rome, Monsignor Mlynarovič resigned the presidency and the Reverend Monsignor Joseph S. Altany of Munhall, Pennsylvania, became president on November 1, 1963. During Monsignor Altany’s presidency, various programs were inaugurated to interest the youth of Slovak ancestry. Youth conferences were held in conjunction with the Federation conventions and a national youth conference was held in Washington, D.C., in 1970.

In Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in May 1973, at the Federation’s first convention outside the United States, it was decided to promote its work among Canadian Catholics of Slovak ancestry as well. It was at this convention that the delegates elected the Reverend Joseph V. Adamec, chancellor of the Diocese of Saginaw, as the Federation’s next president. During Father Adamec’s presidency, programs to strengthen the role of the Federation among Slovak Catholics were inaugurated. The annual Slovak Catholic Federation Appeal was established and promoted. The collection was take up around the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Slovak parishes and earmarked to support the Slovak Institute in Rome. The Conference of Slovak Religious was founded which included ten communities of men and women in the United States and Canada with Slovak roots. The presidents, secretaries, and chaplains of the affiliated Slovak Catholic fraternal societies were included as members of the Federation’s Executive Board. Pastoral conferences were hosted by several of the Federation’s regions during these years. The Slovak Catholic Federation took an active part in the American Bicentennial celebrations in Detroit and Philadelphia.

A picture of Saints Cyril and Methodius was used on the cover of the January J.S. Paluch missalette through the efforts of Federation activists in 1976. The Federation played an important part in promoting
Slovak Catholic participation on the International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia and sent delegates to the first Call to Action convention in Detroit.

A noteworthy event took place on September 15, 1979, as an old friend of the Federation, the Reverend Monsignor Jozef Tomko, who had been so closely affiliated with the work of the Slovak Institute, received episcopal ordination from Pope John Paul II in the Sistine Chapel. Archbishop Tomko had been named secretary of the Synod of Bishops, a new ecclesiastical institution established by Pope Paul VI in 1965. The Federation sponsored a pilgrimage to Rome for the historic event.

In April 1985, the Federation hosted its fifty-first convention in Allentown, Pennsylvania. A special highlight of the event was the presence of His Grace, Archbishop Pio Laghi, the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio. It was the first time that the Holy Father’s personal representative in the United States took part in a convention of the Federation. The Pro-Nuncio was honored at a dinner hosted by the Federation. He later served as the principal celebrant of a special pan-Slavic liturgy commemorating the eleventh centenary of the death of Saint Methodius, at Saint Catherine of Siena Cathedral in Allentown.

An history-making event also highlighted the convention. On the morning of April 24, Bishop Grutka received a call from Rome indicating that Pope John Paul II had elevated Archbishop Tomko to the College of Cardinals and appointed him Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. The long-standing desire of Slovaks to have their own cardinal finally became a reality and the fact that the new cardinal was a close friend of the Federation added to the joy of the appointment. Cardinal Tomko was the first Slovak cardinal created in the twentieth century. The Federation led a pilgrimage to Rome for the Consistory of Cardinals held on May 25, 1985. Cardinal Tomko’s many Federation friends and collaborators over the years rejoiced with him as he received “the red hat” and began his new ministry as prefect of the missionary arm of the Church. The “red pope,” as the prefect of this congregation is traditionally known, appealed to his Slovak friends in America to assist him in his new role. The Federation responded appropriately as it organized the Cardinal Tomko Mission Fund to raise monies to build churches in mission lands. The Slovak fraternal societies likewise supported Cardinal Tomko’s plea and continue to support the work of evangelization in the best traditions of the Cyrilo-Methodian heritage of faith.

Another wonderful outcome of the 1985 convention was the establishment of the Federation’s newest chapter in the Allentown Diocese. The Cardinal Jozef Tomko Chapter was formally established with great enthusiasm in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania and has since its inception contributed much to the vitality of the Slovak Catholic Federation.

In November 1985, the Federation led another pilgrimage to Rome to commemorate the eleventh centenary of the death of Saint Methodius. As part of the celebrations, the Slovak Catholic Federation published a book titled, “Saints Cyril and Methodius Among the Slovaks.” After the fifty-first convention, at the suggestion of the late Reverend John J Spitkovsky of Chicago then spiritual director of the Federation, a new program was established to assist Slovak seminarians. Slovak American priests were asked to contribute $100 annually to support Slovak seminarians in Rome. This group called itself “The Conference of Slovak Clergy.” It provides mutual support among American priests of Slovak ancestry while promoting the work of the Federation. Two representatives of the Conference serve as members of the Federation’s Executive Board.

On April 20, 1986, The Federation observed its seventy-fifth anniversary with a gala celebration in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Heading the list of dignitaries was His Eminence, Jozef Cardinal Tomko, and a number of American bishops also participated in this great anniversary to salute the work of the Federation.

The president of the Federation, the Reverend Monsignor Joseph V. Adamec, received episcopal ordination from Cardinal Tomko and was installed as the seventh bishop of the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese.
on May 20, 1987. It was the first time in its history that a president of the Federation had been named a bishop. Bishop Adamec continued his work as president until July of that year. Following his resignation, the first executive vice president, the Reverend Monsignor Edward M. Matash, New Jersey, assumed the office of president.

During the ensuing years, the Federation continued its pastoral work promoting closer contact with the Church of Slovakia. The long-standing desire to host a pilgrimage to Slovakia finally came about when the communist government of Czecho-Slovakia gave permission to receive such a pilgrimage of the Slovak Catholic Federation in September of 1990. A total of 160 Slovak Catholics from American traveled with the leadership of the Slovak Catholic Federation visiting all the dioceses in Slovakia.

With the fall of communism in 1989, a new chapter began in the work of the Slovak Catholic Federation. As in previous years, the Slovak Catholic community in the United States and Canada met the challenge of trying to assist the Church in Slovakia as it emerged after years of communist oppression. For more than four decades, the church in Slovakia suffered greatly. Many of the bishops were imprisoned and a number of Catholics died there. Most of the seminaries were closed and religious communities of men and women were abolished. The Slovak Catholic press was almost non-existent. The Saint Adalbert Society (Spolok Svätého Vojtecha), which had close links with the Federation in the early years of this century, was now in need of support. The Federation's response was as determined as ever. The Slovak Church Fund was established by the Federation with an office in Danville, Pennsylvania. Funds from the annual appeal of the Federation were earmarked for support of the Church in Slovakia and were channeled to each bishop in Slovakia to support the most pressing needs of the Church. Seminaries were reestablished and monies were used to support religious communities of men and women as well.

On January 1, 1993, Slovakia declared its independence. It was an occasion of rejoicing for Slovaks both at home and throughout the world. That year, the fifty-third national convention was held in Youngstown, Ohio. The delegates welcomed the Most Reverend Rudolf Balá*, president of the Slovak Bishops Conference, who presented a report on the Church in Slovakia and expressed thanks and gratitude to the Slovak Catholic Federation for its continued support. It was at this convention that the Youngstown Region of the Federation was established much to the joy of American Slovaks in the northeastern part of the State of Ohio.

On November 11, 1993, the Lord called Bishop Andrew G. Grutka to Himself. Throughout his episcopal ministry, he had championed the work of the Federation and ranked among the greatest leaders to have emerged from the Slovak Community in the United States. He was a kind and loving minister of the Church; an inspiring leader of social justice and equality; and a good neighbor and friend – a true Slovak!

The fifty-fourth convention of the Federation was convened at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, in 1996 on the occasion of the eighty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Federation. Among the guests present were the Most Reverend Ján Sokol, archbishop of Bratislava-Trnava, the Most Reverend Bernard Bober, auxiliary bishop of Košice, the Most Reverend Andrej Imrich, auxiliary bishop of Spiš, and the Reverend Monsignor Štefan Vrablec, rector of the College of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Rome. The cardinal of the diocese of Nitra and the Eastern rite bishop of Prešov also sent priest representatives. It was a convention historical moment to have a number of distinguished clergy from the Slovak Republic, in addition to the rector if the Slovak Institute in Rome. The delegates elected the Reverend Peter M. Polando of Youngstown, Ohio as president for the next four years.

With Slovakia declaring its independence and grappling with western concepts and ideologies, new challenges faced the Church of Slovakia. With seminaries renovated or erected, religious houses and local churches had to be built or restored. The Church in Slovakia encountered an influx of vocations to the religious life and the need for the laity to renew their role within the life of the Church became apparent.
The Slovak Church Fund continued to receive generous donations and the Federation was able to assist in establishing a new Discalced Carmelite monastery in Košice, help in the repairs and building of the children's home in Ružomberok sponsored by the School Sisters of Saint Francis, and revitalize the library at Saint Francis Xavier Seminary in Banská Bystrica. In addition, monies were made available to the Spolok Svatého Vojtecha for the printing of the Church's new catechism in Slovak and toward construction of a new church structure in Tajov, Slovakia, the birthplace of the Federation's founder, the Reverend Jozef Murgaš. In 1999, the Executive Board of the Federation voted that fifteen percent of the annual appeal which was supported by 233 Slovak ethnic parishes around the United States and Canada be given to the seven religious communities represented on the Board to their respective orders in the Slovak Republic.

The Slovak Catholic Federation's tradition of being a prayerful federating body for Catholics of Slovak descent in the United States remains an integral force in its existence. Responding to Pope John Paul's II call for spiritual preparation for Jubilee Year 2000, the Federation sponsored pilgrimages to significant places which are held close to member's hearts: Rome and the Pontifical College of Saints Cyril and Methodius in 1998; Danville and the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius in 1999; and Washington, D.C., and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in the Jubilee Year 2000. At the request of the Conference of Slovak Religious, holy cards depicting the images of Saints Cyril and Methodius with a prayer for a renewed evangelization were printed both in English and in Slovak and distributed in the United States and the Slovak Republic.

The close friend of the Federation, His Eminence, Jozef Cardinal Tomko, celebrated his fiftieth anniversary of ordination to the priesthood in 1999. Festivities commemorating this event were held both in the Eternal City and in his home archdiocese of Košice. A delegation of priests, headed by the Most Reverend Joseph V. Adamec, traveled to Rome to congratulate the Cardinals, to celebrate Holy Mass with him, and to convey, on behalf of the members of the Federation, their affection for and joy with him.

Numbers of dedicated laity, religious and clergy have labored diligently on behalf of the Slovak Catholic Federation. The Federation has a glorious history which is a source of pride to all American Catholics who cherish their Slovak heritage. It is the work of the present generation to promote the purpose of the Federation with the same vigor and vitality which inspired its members during the past ninety years. Through the intercessions of Our Lady of Sorrows, patroness of the Slovak Republic, and of Saints Cyril and Methodius, patrons of the Slovak Catholic Federation, may the members nurture these goals and assist in bringing them to completion. MAY THE MESSAGE GO OUT TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH as the members of the Slovak Catholic Federation continue to OPEN WIDE THE DOORS TO CHRIST!

The fifty-fifth National Convention of the Slovak Catholic Federation was held in Yonkers, New York, during the Great Jubilee Year of 2000. The convention sessions were held October 28-31, 2000. The highlight of the convention was the concelebrated Pontifical Liturgy in Most Holy Trinity Church. The Most Reverend Joseph V. Adamec, bishop of Altoona-Johnstown and the Episcopal Moderator for the Federation was the principal celebrant. Also participating in the liturgy were The Most Reverend František Tondra, bishop of Spiš and president of the Bishop’s Conference of Slovakia; Ukrainian-rite Bishop Basil Losten of Stamford, Connecticut; Abbot Roger W. Gries, O.S.B. of Cleveland, Ohio and The Reverend Monsignor František Novajovský, rector of the Pontifical Slovak College of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Rome. Providing the homily for the liturgy was the National Chaplain for the Federation, the Reverend Andrew S. Hvozdovic. In addition to the representation of distinguished clergy, more than 25 priests of Slovak ancestry form across the country concelebrated. A festive banquet attended by more that 300 delegates and guests followed at the Polish Community Center. During this convention, the Reverend Philip A. Altavilla of Scranton, Pennsylvania, was elected as the Federation’s national president with Dolores M. Evanko, of Hazleton, Pennsylvania, elected to serve as national secretary-treasurer.

The Holy Year of 2001 was an important year in the life of the Slovak Catholic Federation. Joy
resounded throughout the organization when it was announced that His Holiness, John Paul II, had elevated Abbot Roger W. Gries, O.S.B., of Cleveland, Ohio, and long-time activist within the Federation, to the office of bishop. Following his episcopal ordination on June 7, 2001 in Saint John’s Cathedral in Cleveland, Ohio, the now Bishop Gries was named the Auxiliary Bishop of Cleveland as well as Titular Bishop of Praesidium.

With the new appointment and accompanying duties of Bishop Gries, the monks of Saint Andrew Svorad Benedictine Abbey in Cleveland found themselves needing to elect a new superior. On June 8, 2001, The Reverend Clement L. Zeleznik, O.S.B. was elected the fifth Abbot of the Abbey. The abbatial blessing took place on September 8, 2001 and was presided over by The Most Reverend Roger, W. Gries, O.S.B., Auxiliary Bishop of Cleveland. With this transition, Saint Andrew Svorad Abbey’s long association with the Slovak Catholic Federation continued with the enthusiastic support of Abbot Clement.

On September 30, 2001, the Slovak Catholic Federation commemorated its ninetieth anniversary with a celebratory religious and social program. A concelebrated Pontifical Mass of Thanksgiving was held in Saint John the Baptist Church in Taylor, Pennsylvania, whose pastor was The Reverend Philip A. Altavilla, also the national president of the Federation. The Most Reverend Joseph V. Adamec, bishop of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown was the principal celebrant and homilist at this special liturgy. In addition to Bishop Adamec, the celebration was blessed by the presence of Abbot Clement L. Zeleznik, O.S.B. of the Saint Andrew Svorad Abbey, and twenty-one invited priests of Slovak ancestry.

Following the celebration of the Eucharist, a festive banquet, attended by more than 250 guests, was held at the Clarion Hotel in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The program at the dinner consisted of authentic Slovak dancing and singing and an address given by The Reverend Charles P. Connor, Ph.D., a noted Catholic historian and priest of the Diocese of Scranton. Along with an historical perspective on our faith and its traditions, the evening included an opportunity to honor four individuals for their efforts within the American Slovak Catholic community. Those being honored for their contributions were: The Reverend Monsignor Francis J. Beeda, S.T. L., pastor of the oldest Slovak parish in the United States, Saint Joseph’s Parish in Hazleton, Pennsylvania; Trude Check-Tuhy of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, a highly esteemed musician, vocalist and Slovak cultural activist; The Reverend Monsignor Peter M. Polando of Youngstown, Ohio, the immediate past president of the Federation; and Bernadette J. Demechko, also of Youngstown, Ohio, the past national secretary-treasurer of the Federation.

The year after the anniversary liturgy, on September 15, 2002, on the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, patroness of the Slovak people, the Federation hosted a pilgrimage to the Villa Sacred Heart, the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Danville, Pennsylvania. This journey of faith afforded the pilgrims an opportunity to take part in special devotions and various presentations. The highlight of the event was the celebration of the Pontifical Liturgy in the Basilica of Saints Cyril and Methodius with The Most Reverend Joseph V. Adamec, Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown as the principal celebrant and homilist.

On February 22, 2003, the people of Slovak heritage were once again blessed with the episcopal ordination of The Most Reverend Ronald W. Gainer, the sixth American bishop of Slovak ancestry. Formerly a priest in the Diocese of Allentown, Pennsylvania, with his installation in the Cathedral of Christ the King in Lexington, Kentucky, Bishop Gainer now became the second bishop of the Diocese of Lexington.

Also in February of 2003, the twenty-fifth Slovak Catholic Federation Saints Cyril and Methodius Appeal was taken up in parishes of Slovak heritage. This particular year marked a quarter of a century that that this appeal has been taking place to support the ministry of the Pontifical Slovak College of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Rome as well as the religious communities of men and women in Slovakia.
On September 6, 2003, the Slovak Catholic Federation hosted a pilgrimage to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. More than 750 pilgrims from various parts of the United States journeyed to our nation’s capital to participate in the pilgrimage in honor of Our Mother of Sorrows, patroness of Slovakia. The Most Reverend Joseph V. Adamec was principal celebrant of the pilgrimage liturgy and blessed the newly restored Chapel of Our Mother of Sorrows, patroness of Slovakia. The chapel was a gift of the First Catholic Slovak Union in 1965. Addressing the pilgrims was the Archbishop of Washington, Cardinal Theodore W. McCarrick and Slovakia’s Ambassador to the United States, Rastislav Káčer. Also participating in the liturgy were Bishop David A. Zubik of Green Bay Wisconsin, Bishop John R. Gaydos of Jefferson City, Missouri and Abbot Clement L. Zeleznik, O.S. B. of Cleveland, Ohio.

As we gather in Hazleton, Pennsylvania and Saint Joseph’s Parish in particular, it is appropriate that we recall the worthy past accomplishments of the Slovak Catholic Federation over these ninety-four years. Like Saint Joseph’s Parish, the cradle of the Slovak Catholic ministry in the United States, the Slovak Catholic Federation must continue to give witness to our Cyrilo-Methodian heritage of faith. The situation of Slovak Catholics in America today is far different than that of 1911. Our pioneer Slovak forebears met the challenges of the period. They built numerous churches, schools, and other religious institutions in various parts of the United States and beyond. These parishes bore rich fruit in having preserved the faith of our ancestors and gave the American Church many vocations. The Slovak parishes were a bridge between the old world and the new, nurturing and sustaining the traditions and faith of our ancestors. Our situation in 2005 is very different. Many of our Slovak parishes have been closed or merged. The challenge for today’s Catholics of Slovak ancestry is to give witness to our Cyrilo-Methodian heritage of faith where ever we live and in what ever faith community we find ourselves. In this new situation, the Slovak Catholic Federation will continue to address the pastoral needs of American Catholics of Slovak ancestry on the road to our centennial in 2011.

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