

# **Bishop honors miners lost in Monongah disaster of 1907**

MONONGAH, W.Va. – One hundred years to the day after the Dec. 6, 1907, Monongah mine disaster – the worst coal-mine disaster in U.S. history – the people of Monongah came together to remember the 361 miners and others who lost their lives in the tragedy.

At a ceremony in Monongah, Bishop Michael J. Bransfield of Wheeling-Charleston blessed a large memorial bell donated to the town by the Italian government, as many of the miners who perished in the disaster were Italian immigrants. The bell stands adjacent to “Monongah Heroine,” a memorial statue of a woman and children, which honors the families of the fallen miners.

Also present for the tribute were representatives of the Italian government, including Giovanni Castelaneta, the ambassador to the U.S.; West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin and other state and local representatives; and large contingents from Italy, Canada, West Virginia and around the country – all to honor the memory of the miners who lost their lives while working to make a better life for their families.

“We have a responsibility to tell their story,” Manchin said at the ceremony. “We will never forget the suffering, the human tragedy, the destruction of lives and altering of lives and all of the heroes and heroines.”

Mining is a big part of West Virginia’s heritage, Manchin said, and has “brought so many families from around the world to these hills.” He said the tragedy called attention to the need for mine safety and that by 1910 Congress had established the Bureau of Mines.

At the ceremony, children from the community read the names of the miners who died in the 1907 disaster.

Afterward, Bishop Bransfield celebrated Mass at Holy Spirit Parish in Monongah, which was packed with people who had come for the anniversary. Concelebrating were Father John P. Mulcahy, pastor; former pastors Father Laurence Wrenn and

Father Andrew Lukas; and Father Robert Perriello, pastor of St. Peter the Fisherman Parish in Fairmont.

In his homily, Bishop Bransfield spoke of the impact the disaster had on the town, noting that many of the men who died left behind wives and children. "We cannot even imagine the sorrow and devastation that was present," he said.

Addressing the need for safety, the bishop said, "We pray that our government works harder and harder to protect our miners." He also noted the mine-safety legislation that has been implemented in the last few years.

Pointing to the many people from Italy and Canada at the Mass, Bishop Bransfield said: "Your presence makes us very aware that so many who died were immigrants to our country working hard below ground for long hours and many days. ... We mourn their passing today, and as we pray to God for the care of all miners of our country and the world, especially in West Virginia, let us remember why they died. They were in the mines for their families."

At the end of the Mass, Bishop Bransfield blessed a painting of Our Lady of Pompeii, a gift to the parish from the Shrine of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Pompeii, Italy, through the Federazione delle Associazioni della Campania, U.S.A.

Addressing the congregation, Father Mulcahy mentioned the great financial support the Italian government has provided in restoring the graves of the miners at the parish-administered Mount Calvary Cemetery.

"It was an empty field a year ago," the priest said, "and has been beautifully restored, and they have also donated this beautiful monument to the miners."

The faithful then gathered with Bishop Bransfield at Mount Calvary, where he blessed the monument. Following the blessing, Castelaneta said the Italian government donated the monument to honor the miners and the sacrifice they made for their families.

"The Italian government decided to commemorate the sacrifice of so many Italian coal miners one century ago," he said. "Thanks to this sacrifice, the Italian community grew more and more and now you have such a wonderful Italian-

American community all around the state, thanks to people like those ... we commemorate (who) started this hard work."

He said they built a better future for their children.