

THE HISTORY OF ST. STANISLAUS CHURCH

Writing the history of St. Stanislaus Parish, is in effect, writing the history of the Polish settlement in the City of Erie. Andrew and Catherine Mendlewski and their six children were the first Poles to locate in Erie. History records their arrival on May 30, 1868.

Approximately 15 years later the Reverend Anthony Klawiter of Dunkirk, New York encouraged the now small settlement of Poles to purchase six lots at the corner of 13th and Wallace Street. The lots were designated as a starter for organizing a parish for these Polish families.

By 1883, there were 85 Polish families in the City of Erie, most of whom attended services at St. Mary's Church on East Ninth Street. The people sought their own priest who would cater to their spiritual needs. The Polish settlers petitioned the Most Reverend Tobias Mullen, then Bishop of Erie, to help them.

A Benedictine priest, the Reverend Carl Lenz, from St. Mary's Parish initiated a house-to-house canvas for the purpose of collecting funds to begin a Polish Parish. He collected a total of \$1,963.50.

The money was used to purchase materials to begin construction of an edifice 40 feet by 80 feet. All work was to be done by volunteers. On October 19, 1884, Bishop Mullen blessed the cornerstone.

A year later on October 11th, Bishop Mullen blessed the church which was dedicated to St. Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr. The ceremony was organized by the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, an organization of men who were chartered as a Society on September 20th of that year. There were 50 charter members in that Society.

Temporarily, the Benedictine Fathers assumed leadership of the new church. Also, during this first year a Mr. Michael Konkol was asked to assume the duties of being the church organist.

During the Vesper Services on Sunday, August 22, 1886, the Most Reverend Bishop Mullen formally installed the first resident pastor, Reverend Andrew Ignasiak. Since there wasn't a rectory, Father Ignasiak was forced to live away from the church. His temporary residence was on East Seventh Street. One week after the installation, Father Ignasiak outlined plans for a new rectory adjacent to the church. On April 1, 1887, the pastor moved into the permanent rectory. After settling in his new home, the pastor turned his attention to providing school facilities. Two rooms in the rectory were utilized for this purpose. Classes were started in the Spring of 1887 for 70 children who were taught by the pastor, himself. During the first school year, 11 children participated in the church's First Holy Communion.

That same year, a plot of ground was purchased on 12th Street for the construction of a school. Plans were formalized in October, and in May, 1888, construction was started on a two-story wooden structure. Formal dedication took place on September 2, 1888. The following day, 100 students reported to school. The teaching staff consisted of the pastor and the new church organist, John Nowak. By 1890, 200 families made up the congregation. This necessitated the hiring of two full-time teachers. There were 142 persons in the first Confirmation class that year.

In the fall of 1891, the parish hall and auditorium were erected along East

First Poles Arrive

Cornerstone Blessed

Church Blessed and Dedicated

First Pastor Installed

School Begins

13th Street. It was a frame structure that was formally dedicated by Bishop Mullen on the 19th of November. During the month of November, the Moniuszko Singing Society was organized. The Society, at the time, contributed greatly to the cultural life of the Poles in Erie by maintaining a library of considerable size. In addition, the Society frequently presented stage plays that provided edification as well as relaxation for the hard-working people of the parish.

Felicians Teach School

On January 1, 1892, the annual parish meeting was held. At this meeting, the Felician Sisters assumed leadership of the school. The total school enrollment numbered 240 children. A portion of the school building was remodeled to house the Sisters.

During December, 1892, the first mission services in the history of the parish were conducted by Father W. Sebastyarski, S.J.

In 1893, the greatest expansion and organization of church societies took place: the Sacred Heart Benevolent Society organized September 22, 1885; the St. Stanislaus Benevolent Society in 1889; the Women's Rosary Society in October, 1886; the Matki Boskiej Czestochowej Benevolent Society in 1893; the Young Ladies Society of the Immaculate Conception in 1890; the Young Men's Society of St. Stanislaus Kostka in 1895; the Knights of St. Casimir in the spring of 1892; and the Society of Women under the name of the Apostleship of Prayer in February 1893, as well as the Polish Women's Alliance - St. Hedwig's Circle, a fraternal life insurance organization.

Plans Made for a New, Bigger Church

The parish was growing almost daily. Standing room was at a premium for practically all services. The need for a new and much larger church was unquestionable. Since the parish was debt free at the time, the plans for a new church were evolved. During the month of July, 1894, the wooden church was moved to the playground. Work was immediately begun on laying the foundation for a church building that was to be 66 feet wide in the nave and 147 feet long.

New Rectory Built

On February 8, 1895, fire destroyed the rectory. Work was immediately begun on a new brick replacement, the present rectory. By September 12th, the pastor was able to occupy his new quarters.

Ten days later, with the basement of the church completed and covered, the cornerstone of the present St. Stanislaus Church was blessed by Bishop Mullen. In 1896, the outside work of this new Roman style church was completed except for the two 135-foot steeples. For economic reasons, this work was deferred.

During the summer of 1896, a piece of property facing the church on Wallace Street was purchased and the school building was moved to this location.

Formal Dedication of Church

In the early months of 1897, considerable headway was made on the interior of the church. By the first of April, the first services were held in the new church. Construction of the woodwork, plastering, painting, setting of the altars, installation of the pews and the organ were completed during the remainder of 1897 and 1898. On Sunday, September 25, 1898, the Most Reverend Bishop John E. Fitzmaurice formally dedicated the present St. Stanislaus. That afternoon, the Sacrament of Confirmation was administered. On the following day, the opening of Forty Hours Devotion took place.

On January 1, 1900, a fire in the sacristy destroyed the interior and did considerable damage to the church proper. As a result, it was necessary to rebuild and repaint the present interior. During May of the same year, the parish was provided with three bells which were purchased by various societies. Shortly after, work was begun on the construction of the two church towers.

In September of 1900, over 500 children enrolled for the school year, many more than could be suitably accommodated. The congregation decided that the building of a new and larger school could not be delayed. It was completed in 1901. The new school had an enrollment of 650 children in its regular grades plus 120 in the newly opened kindergarten. There were ten Sisters of the Felician Order in charge. They were assisted by John Nowak, a lay teacher who was with the school from the very first day of its organization. Nowak, who was also the choirmaster and organist, organized an all-male choir. The first three-voice Mass was sung on Christmas Day, 1901.

The first annual Corpus Christi Procession took place in 1902 in the streets adjacent to the church, and it still attracts hundreds of adorers from the Erie area.

During the year 1905, the present Kosciuszko Hall was built along East 13th Street just beyond the rectory. It replaced the old frame parish hall and auditorium which was later moved to the corner of 12th and Reed Street. It became a furniture warehouse.

The Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth took charge of St. Stanislaus School in 1915. That same year, the Sisters' convent was built on East 12th Street.

World War I claimed the lives of thirteen young men of the parish. A total of 357 were in the Armed Forces.

On August 19, 1919, St. Stanislaus Church was consecrated by the Most Reverend Bishop John Mark Gannon, D.D., D.C.L., L.L.D.

To provide educational and recreational facilities for youth, a major step was taken in 1920, namely, the founding and building of the CYMA Club—later to become the East Side Boys Club. A year later on September 14, 1921, Bishop Gannon blessed the building. As a youth center, it contributed immensely to the recreational life in the community.

In September of 1920, St. Stanislaus High School was organized. It was housed in the C.Y.M.A. building and began with a class of ten students. Three courses, Academic, Commercial and Scientific were taught. Maintenance of the high school proved too much of a burden to the parish during the depression years of the thirties and it was closed in 1938. All totaled, 160 boys and girls were graduated from the school.

Peak enrollment at St. Stanislaus Grade School was reached in 1922 when more than 1,100 children attended. This was the largest parochial school attendance in the entire diocese.

On May 9, 1928, Father Ignasiak was elevated to the dignity of Domestic Prelate by His Holiness, Pope Pius XI. He was invested by Bishop Gannon on August 1, 1928. He was the first Monsignor of Polish descent in the history of the Diocese of Erie. Monsignor Ignasiak served as pastor for forty-eight years. He died on December 29, 1934 and was buried on January 2, 1935.

His successor was Reverend Wladislas J. Stanczak, who had been assistant to Monsignor Ignasiak for sixteen years. He was appointed by Bishop Gannon on May 8, 1935.

In December, 1941, the United States became involved in World War II. St. Stanislaus Parish came forth with 774 young men and women who served in the Armed Forces. Twenty-two made the supreme sacrifice.

In the year 1945, St. Stanislaus Church was repainted and redecorated.

In May, 1947, His Holiness, Pope Pius XII conferred Knighthood of St. Gre-

New School Built

*First Corpus Christi
Procession*

*Kosciuszko Hall
Built*

*Sisters of the Holy
Family of Nazareth
Take Charge*

*Church
Consecrated*

Youth Center Built

*High School
Organized*

*Second Pastor
Appointed*

gory on James E. Robaszekiewicz, son of St. Stanislaus Parish. He was the first Knight of Polish descent in the Diocese to receive this distinction.

Through the recommendation of His Excellency Most Reverend John Mark Gannon, Bishop of Erie, Father Stanczak was elevated to the dignity of a Domestic Prelate by His Holiness, Pope Pius XII. Monsignor Stanczak was invested at St. Peter's Cathedral by Bishop Gannon on July 21, 1949.

In 1951, the present St. Stanislaus School and Kosciuszko Hall were renovated and a cafeteria was installed.

In 1959, the altar railing was moved, the sanctuary enlarged and a clock installed in the church tower. In 1960, St. Stanislaus Church celebrated its 75th anniversary and the Reverend Bernard A. Janczewski of Utica, New York, became the first priest from St. Stanislaus to be elevated to Domestic Prelate by His Holiness Pope John XXIII.

On September 25, 1962, the second pastor of St. Stanislaus Church, Monsignor Wladislas J. Stanczak died. The appointment of Reverend Joseph Radziszewski as pastor followed in November, 1962.

In 1963, the interior of the church was repainted and the exterior sandblasted.

The task of maintaining the parish property continued. The major project in school was the installation of closed stairwells and the renovation of existing facilities for the security and comfort of the students. The convent was also remodeled in 1980. New appliances and safety features were installed in the cafeteria and auditorium. New furnishings were added to the church to further enhance its traditional charm.

1985 was the Centennial Year. The observance of the 100th anniversary to the parish began with a program, "Centennial Echoes," presented by the school children, 225 in number, on June 5, 1985.

On September 13th, the Moniuszko Singing Society sponsored a Centennial dinner dance attended by past and present members of our parish.

On September 25th, our Bishop, Michael J. Murphy offered a Mass of thanksgiving as the highlight of our centennial celebration. Concelebrating with him were Father Joseph Radziszewski, the pastor; two Polish Monsignors of our diocese, John D. Daniszewski and Joseph V. Reszkowski; former assistants in our parish; and Father Joseph Kacprowicz, oldest living former assistant. Present in the sanctuary was Monsignor Bernard A. Janczewski, oldest living native son ordained from our parish. Other concelebrants were either native son-priests or those formerly associated with the parish, as well as many friends from neighboring parishes. Among the guests participating in the festivities was Sister Janice Fulmer, Provincial Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, plus a group of Sisters who taught in our school in former years. The Sisters of Nazareth, who came to our parish in 1915, observed the 70th anniversary of teaching children in our parish school.

On Sunday, October 20th, the combined societies of the parish conducted a Centennial Parish Day celebration, featuring a dinner served throughout the afternoon and festival games in the afternoon and evening.

In May, 1989, a study was done, sponsored by the Erie Diocese, regarding the parishes of "east side" Erie. The Neil Meitler study recommended that both St. Stanislaus Parish and School be closed. The pastor at that time, Rev. Joseph Radziszewski, retired on May 31, 1989. The Rev. Bernard J. Urbaniak, a native son of the parish, was appointed as the administrator of the parish.

*75th Anniversary
Celebrated*

*Third Pastor
Appointed*

*Centennial
Celebration*

Neil Meitler Study