**BRIEF HISTORY**  
St. Mary's Church, Schenectady, NY

*The Church shines forth as "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

**The Year** 1967 is one fit for neon lights, as it is a year of significant anniversaries. Canada's Expo '67 has kept us aware of her anniversary. The Holy Father's visit to Fatima has helped us celebrate the anniversary of Blessed Mother's appearances. The parishioners of St. Mary's are engaged in many jubilee activities that keeps them conscious of the diamond anniversary of their founding. One important phase of any of these celebrations is a glance back into the story of its "reason of being." We can better appreciate what we have as members of St. Mary's parish family if we consider a bit of its history in retrospect.

There is historical evidence that Polish immigrants settled in the Mohawk Valley about the year 1863. Due to the great influx of Polish immigrants in this area, a group of Poles organized themselves into the Bratniej Pomocy Society and requested the Bishop for a Polish priest. It was to this nucleus that the Rt. Rev. Francis McNierney D.D. Bishop of the Diocese of Albany sent the newly ordained priest, the Rev. Joseph Dereszewski, to Schenectady to organize the first Polish parish in, the diocese of Albany. Upon his arrival here on December 31, 1891, he was met at the railroad station by an enthused delegation of Poles who escorted him to St. Joseph parsonage.

On New Year's Day, 1892, Father Dereszewski said Mass and delivered a sermon in the Polish language to a large congregation of Poles in St. Joseph's Church. During the afternoon a mass meeting was held in St. Joseph's Hall, and it was then decided to build a Polish Church to be named Matki Boskiej Czestochowskiej (St. Mary's).

The Society, Matki Boskiej Czestochowskiej, with a membership of 82 gave the first donation of $1,000 towards the church fund.
A plot of land was bought on Emmett Street to build a church; but after finding it unsuitable, it was sold and a new site was purchased on Liberty Street (now known as Eastern Avenue) for $2,700.

The first church was constructed of red brick and was 110 ft. long and 53 ft. wide. The entrance to the church was on Irving St.

Members of Church Societies: St. Mary's Society — 82 members; St. Joseph's Society — 12 members; Women's Society, Holy Rosary — 75 members; Young Ladies' Society — 30 members.

Births in the year of 1892-1893: 37 boys, 30 girls. Marriages: 27
Funerals: 9 adults, 16 boys, 12 girls
Attendance in School: 15 boys, 49 girls
No. of Children Received Communion: 6 boys, 18 girls.

Father Dereszewski zealously shepherded all the Polish people in the neighboring cities and villages of Amsterdam, Mechanicville, Albany, Herkimer, Utica, Troy, and Middleville. It was these grateful Polish people and his future parishioners who jointly planned and financed the building of the new church under the patronage of Our Lady of Czestochowa. Ludwig Gapczynski, Peter Kazyaka, and Michael Malewicz were a few of the outstanding leaders of this group and became the first trustees. Fortunately, too, the location of St. Mary's Parish buildings was chosen with foresight as G.E. and the Locomotive works were nascent industries at the time. The Church was dedicated on July 4, 1893, ten years before our present church was constructed, under the jurisdiction of the same Pastor.

Later in 1893, a church-basement school was established by the new Pastor, who himself taught there, along with his organist, Mr. Conrad. Some of the lay teachers were Mr. Malkiewicz, Mr. Kosinski, Felicia Dereszewska. The Resurrection Sisters joined the faculty as the enrollment increased.

Having built our present gray stone church, Father Dereszewski dreamed of erecting a school building. He died in 1911 but left the opportunity to build the school open to his successor as all his debts were cleared. The aforementioned achievements were realized in a spirit of love and unity so zealously engendered by Father Dereszewski in his parishioners. In his first message, he encouraged:

"Love thyselfs as brothers  
and you will accomplish all,  
for in charity and unity the goal  
undertaken will be attained."
The assistant priest, Father Kowalski, became the administrator of the young parish. During his administration, the present school building was erected by 1913. In 1918, he joined the Polish army. During his absence, Father Gostomski worked with and for the parish family, inspiring cultural advancement in the school until his resignation in 1921.
In that same year, Father Francis Ren was appointed second pastor of St. Mary's. During his long years of service, he modernized and generally improved all the parish buildings and parish property as well as paying off a large inherited parish debt. Catechetical work during released time classes was initiated under his direction. Many youths of the parish received guidance from Father Ren in choosing their way of life. Under his spiritual direction, a number were encouraged and helped to serve Christ in the Holy Priesthood: Rev. Ferdinand Scieszka, Rev. Anthony Tralka, Rev. Sigismund Olszewski, Rev. Waclaw Olszewski, Rev. Boleslaus Watroba, Rev. Francis Drzewiscki, Rev. Henry Sarnowski, Rev. Edwin Prusko, Rev. Paul Antos, and Rev. Ronald Matulewicz. At present Raymond Wieber is studying at the seminary in Kentucky.

The religious life was embraced by the following young women in the Congregation of the Sisters of the Resurrection: Sister Imelda Kolobus, Sister Rose Borowski, Sister Bogumila Tajkowski, Sister Stanislaus Wieczynski, Sister Prakseda Kalinowski, Sister Marie Catherine Szumiloski, Sister M. Modesta Kozielski, Sister Martha Samolek (deceased), Sister Louise Samolek, Sister Theophila Puszc (deceased), Sister Catherine Plawinski, Sister Angelina Morek (deceased), Sister Alphonsa Pawlowicz (deceased), Sister Antonia Sollohub (deceased), Sister Francis de Sales Kozielska, Sister M. Berchmans Kolakowski, Sister Athanasia Giniecki, Sister Hilary Burmis, Sister Mechtild Garucki in Australia,

Father Michael W. Zakens has been assistant pastor since January 12, 1946. Due to the failing health of Monsignor Francis S. Ren since 1958, he has shouldered the responsibilities of caring for the material and spiritual needs of the parish. In January of 1963, the Most Rev. William A. Scully, D.D. officially named him as Administrator of St. Mary's Church. During his administration, the church was painted, new lights and pews were installed along with inlay under the pews and carpeting. The rectory was completely denovated, interiorly and exteriorly. The convent and chapel were remodeled. Moreover, the spiritual societies of the parish have received Father's support and guidance through the many years.
The Assistants, who served at St. Mary's, in the past were the Reverends: Valentine Gierlacki, Peter Nowak, Edmund Kempinski, Stanislaus M. Gospodarek, Joseph Blonkowski, Peter Kania, Andrew Blacha, Adalbert Sosna, Zygmunt Olszewski, Zygmunt Jakubowski, Andrew Baj, Edward Tanski, Walter Baniak, Adolf Czelusniak, Raymond Piechocki.

Father Richard Ratajczak, the assistant pastor, is presently moderator of the Holy Name Society and has fostered the spiritual growth of the parish in many ways. He has also endeared himself to the youth of our parish and has offered his help and guidance to them.

As we glance through the pages of history and see the sacrifice and work of the devoted leaders, plus the cooperation of the loyal parishioners through all these years, we gain a kaleidoscopic vision of the progress and maturation of our parish. We cannot help but recall the well-earned eulogy given by a prominent churchman, Right Reverend Archbishop F. A. Symon, way back in 1905, on July 4, the date of the dedication of the first church—During my visit to this country, I have inspected more than 150 churches, and I have yet to find one as beautiful as the structure you have here. I cannot praise you too highly for the work that you have done, and I want to offer you my congratulations. It is a
building of which you may well feel proud — one of which will always stand as a monument to the generosity of your heart.

Undoubtedly, we can conclude that the first seed sown by the founder, Father Joseph Dereszewski, in his first pastoral message to his parishioners, took root and is yielding fruit. May charity and unity prompt further growth, as we, the parish family of St. Mary’s, take on future challenges. May Our Lady of Czestochowa, the Patroness of our Church, continue to intercede for us, to her Divine Son, so that Christ Jesus may always bless our Church and our people.

During this Anniversary we have been paying tribute to the senior members of the church. Now we dedicate to the future of our church the young people who will one day be the leaders and workers in the church and community. In these young people lies the hope and future of our church, our city, our state, our nation and our civilization. May the grace of God be with them and His blessing go with them always.