



### **Concise History of St. Joseph Church.**

85th Anniversary Mass Shrine Church of St. Joseph, Pontiac, MI. December 7, 2008. CAP at Orchard Lake.

In 1923, the League of Catholic Women approached Msgr Grupaa and expressed the spiritual needs of the Polish community in Pontiac. He selected the VERY REV. CANON ANTHONY MAK-SIMIK to contact the Polish for a meeting on March 18, 1923. The group established meetings and named the parish ST. JOSEPH, and, meanwhile, had services at the home of the League of Catholic Women. The group collected money and purchased two lots on South Boulevard at the corner of Bagley. The mission church of the Polish Seminary was blessed on August 10, 1924, and the first Mass was celebrated. Priests from the Seminary celebrated the Masses.

**REV. VINCENT BALCER** was assigned to the Mission Church on March 1, 1925, and left on July 22, 1925.

**REV. STANLEY TENEROWICZ** was then assigned the Mission of St. Joseph on July 23, 1925 and stayed until June 2, 1933. He set the foundation for the parish, purchased the record books for Baptism, Death, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, etc.

**REV. THEODORE KOWAIESKI** was appointed pastor by the Archdiocese on June 3, 1933 and stayed until July 4, 1939. In the midst of the Great Depression the parish dwindled to just a few families, and the pastor paid many of the bills personally; however, he also made improvements in the church building, brought many parishioners back to the parish and built the rectory -- though with a considerable debt.

**REV. B. J. JARZEMBOWSKI** was appointed pastor on July 5, 1939, and he remained until August, 1962. Very displeased with the debts, he raised funds and liquidated the debt. He also had a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin and established Pilgrimages to honor her, the Confraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and many other societies, Crucifixion Group statues, 13th and 14th stations and later erected the stations to completion, with a formal erection ceremony. Established the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine; collected funds for the interior and exterior remodeling of the church, including the basement under the building. A vestibule was added with the bell tower and St. Anthony bell, confessionals, sacristies, and sanctuary, as well as the stairs to all sacristies. Mexican people moved into the area, later followed by the African-American people. There were numerous ministries to both groups, and the conversion of many African-Americans. The Pastor celebrated several priestly ordination jubilees.

**REV. MITCHELL KAMINSKI** was ordained and celebrated his first Mass in the parish. The Grotto Chapel was built but other requests were denied.

**REV. FRANCIS OKONOWSKI**, August 22, 1962, continued the Pilgrimages, annual books and devotions, and paved the parking lot. However, a letter reveals that he was quite ill.

**REV. EDWARD POPIELARZ** served from July 6, 1969 until his death on December 6, 1986. Rev. Fred Klettner was the Chaplain and helped out.

**REV. WILLIAM EASTON** was made the Administrator during the latter part of the pastor's time, with Rev. Joseph Szewczyk celebrating Masses. He continued the Pilgrimages and added a Festival of Celebration (often two to three days in length). Rev. Popielarz also dreamed of an interior renovation of the church and had architectural drawings made but was unable to raise the funds. There were many events, dinners and the well-loved Bal Chretien events. Acceptance Classes which he had put into place at a previous location were moved to St. Joseph's. Fr. Pop's Clinic, Inc. was founded and privately incorporated with the help of John Dorsey, M.D. which offered families free medical, dental and legal services

**M. PATRICIA MALONE, RSM r PASTORAL ASSOCIATE- ADMINISTRATOR** under the supervision of Rev. William Easton, Pastor of St. Vincent de Paul and Administrator of Shrine Parish of St. Joseph, started on March 19, 1987, and left her duties on April 1, 2008. Some of the liturgical Presiders during those years were: Rev. Joseph Szewczyk; Rev. James O'Reilly, S.J.; Rev. Fabian Slominski; Rev. T. Ryan, S.J.; Rev. Thomas Physician; Rev. Paschal Igwe. The parish Festivals continued for several years. The upper church building was remodeled with new windows, lights, carpeting, painting, a sound system, refinished pews, and the installation of a lavatory, a sanctuary altar, removal of the communion rail, the stations of the cross positions were changed, as well as the confessional.

The church changed to congregational singing, and the statues were rearranged, etc. A ramp was added to allow for handicap access. In the hall, a dropped ceiling was installed, the lavatories were remodeled, the kitchen up-dated with cabinets and new stoves, etc. A new air-conditioning system was added, and the fan-steps were removed for safety. The back stairs to the hall were also remodeled for safety reasons.

Sister Pat also operated Fr. Pop's Clinic, which was later moved to the Grotto to accommodate the handicapped, operated a food pantry, reroofed all the buildings, replaced the windows in the rectory, and repaved two-thirds of the parking lot.

Parishioner volunteer services brought the parish into financial stability, as well as savings in the Archdiocesan loan depository. The parish grew, and renewed involvement established a parish from three distinct groups: Polish, Hispanic and Anglo (all others). Today the church boasts a diverse cultural body that remains a welcoming, close-knit community.