



History of Sacred Heart Parish, La Porte, IN.

50th Anniversary Sacred Heart Church 1913-1963, La Porte, IN. CAP at Orchard Lake.

There remain very few original members living among us today, who can relate exactly every phase of the history of our church. Therefore, we sought out the few remaining pioneers and their families, to help us collect the information which follows. We thank them for the cooperation and the helping hand that they so gladly offered. Please forgive us if some name or date was missed.

One of the basic causes of immigration of Poles to the United States was the great desire for freedom which was constantly being limited in Poland.

In the year 1903 there were just three families of Polish descent in the city of La Porte. They were the families of Anton Buzalski, Joseph Chlebowski and Konstantyn Kachur. At that time the Planett Manufacturing Company moved its industry to La Porte from Chicago. Hearing of the employment, immigration continued at a more rapid pace. The Polish population grew to 5 families and about 40 single persons, who proceeded to bring their loved ones from their native country.

These pioneers, because of their minority, language barrier, and their unfamiliar ways, suffered what seemed to them insurmountable obstacles and hardships in this city. Not being understood placed them on the defensive. They held themselves aloof, except for a few individuals. But with the increase in Polish population, they overcame their repressed feeling and began to make progress.

In 1906 the country was in a serious depression. However, through the generosity of the Rumely Brothers of the M. Rumely Company, manufacturers of farm implements, the Poles found employment, so that by 1908 a sizable Polish community was formed.

Being people of deep religious background, they felt a desperate need for religion in their native tongue. Father A. Messman provided a visiting Polish priest from time to time to hear confessions at St. Joseph's Church. But for the devout, that did not suffice, they hungered for more.

As the population grew, there was also need for social life. Being friendly and hospitable people, the need for a meeting place was becoming more evident.

On August 2, 1908 Mr. Joseph Kowalczyk, and Mr. Walter Lopadka founded the first Polish organization in La Porte, the Polish Alma Mater of St. Casimir the King, District No. 27. The first officers were: Joseph Kowalczyk, president; Joseph Wojcik, vice president; Anton Rlzeszotko, recording secretary; Walter Lopatka, financial secretary, Paul Kowalczyk, treasurer, Vincent Kos and Anton Zon, directors and Albert Gega, sergeant at arms.

The first step toward unity, and the forming of a solid Polish American community was taken. With much effort and hard work the White Eagle hall was built on Hagenbuck Street (now Pulaski Street). To further promote social life another organization was founded, namely: the Polish National Alliance. (Histories of other organizations will be found on other pages of this book.) In 1910 the women's branch of the Polish Alma Mater was organized, but after a short period of time was merged with the male organization.

The much needed hall added encouragement to the groups and their social obligations. But to the deeply religious people, it still left a great deal to be desired.

With the increase in Polish population, the St Joseph's church was becoming overcrowded, and Father Messman suggested that the people appeal to the bishop for a new parish.

September 15, 1912 was the memorable day when first steps were initiated to organize a parish. Under the auspices of the Polish Alma Mater organization, the Rev. John Sobieszczyk, who had been administering services to the Poles at St. Joseph's church, was invited to be present. At 2:30 that afternoon a meeting of all interested persons was called by the president Mr. Walter Lopatka. A formative committee was elected as follows: Anton Buzalski, Joseph Chlebowski, Anton Zon, Michael Slosarz and Walter Lopatka.

On October 20, 1912 the committee met with His Excellency Bishop Herman Alerding of Fort Wayne, who was performing duties at St. Joseph's Church, and they presented to Him a petition requesting a parish. With the support and a promise of \$10,000.00 from the sympathetic Rumely Brothers the bishop promised his consideration, and asked architect Geo. W. Allen to submit plans and bid for a combined church school building. The bishop also promised to send a Polish priest as soon as he could arrange a transfer from another diocese, since there was none available in this diocese.

The White Eagle Hall was established to be a temporary church. The house at 406 Park Street was rented from Mrs. John Bach, and was being renovated to serve as the rectory.

The great day of fulfillment came on January 25, 1913. Rev. Father Zircher, then pastor of St. Joseph's reported to the La Porte Herald that he received a telegram from Rev. John Osadnik from Duluth, Minnesota, that he would arrive that afternoon. With tears of joy, the parishioners received their first pastor, to bring them even closer together through religion. However, when Father Osadnik arrived, the rectory was not ready for occupancy. For three weeks He lived in an upstairs room at the Buzalski home, corner of Park and Bach Streets (now the Felix Wysocki home).

Rev. John W. Osadnik was born May 2, 1876, in Gorgenberg, Germany, and pursued his studies

for the priesthood in Cracow, Poland. He was ordained on July 5, 1902 by Cardinal John Puzyna, Bishop of Cracow. He came to the United States in 1908 and worked first in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, and then in Cloquet, Minnesota. In 1913 he was received into the diocese of Fort Wayne and held the pastorate in this parish until February 7, 1920. Soon after Father Osadnik became Pastor of St. Adalbert's Parish in South Bend, he found that the school could not accommodate all children of the parish. At the parish meeting in January 1923 Father Osadnik appointed a committee, and plans were made to remodel the entire school church building for school purposes and erect a new church.

On May 4, 1927, Pope Pius XI conferred the title of Domestic Prelate on Father Osadnik. He had the honor and distinction of being the first priest in this area to receive the title. The Investiture in the purple robes of the Monsignor took place at his Silver Jubilee Mass on July 3, 1927.

On March 25, 1933 Monsignor Osadnik was decorated by General Joseph Hailer, in the name of the government of Poland, with the Polonia Restituta Cross, the order of highest merit a civilian may possess.

Monsignor Osadnik retired on January 23, 1940, after a few years of failing health. He died on his birthday, May 2, 1942. Bishop Noll and many clergy attended. No eulogy was preached in accordance with Monsignor Osadnik's wish.

Memorial to Monsignor John W. Osadnik

In the hearts of the many Polish American families to whom he ministered, there is erected another monument more lasting than marble, and which neither time nor winds can ever efface a monument of grateful affection, and prayerful remembrance to Him who had been to them in unnumbered ways a Spiritual Father, a loving friend, the Shepherd of their souls.

The first Mass of the newly organized parish was celebrated on the 26th day of January 1913 at the White Eagle Hall.

At a meeting on February 9, it was unanimously agreed that the parish was officially organized and the church when erected was to be named the Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

In the meantime, the committee worked feverishly to raise funds, and discussed two possible sites for the new church. Either to buy the building on East Lincoln Way at Boston Street, across from Jim's Grocery (building now being razed for the new shopping center) or to purchase ground and build. They agreed to purchase 5 lots on the corner of Bach and Mechanic Streets (now Pulaski) from the A. Mlynski and M. Kubinieć families.

On the 27th of May, 1913 the committee accepted the bid for a church school building of 20,000.00, and the contract was granted to Larson Danielson Construction Company.

About that time the country's economy became shaky. Because the Rumely Company went bankrupt, the promise by the Rumely brothers could not be fulfilled, and the burden fell heavily on the people. Many were unemployed and the situation became critical. The bishop ordered

that further building be discontinued. This was a crucial time. Some took a strong stand against continuing, but as the planners with Father Osadnik became engaged in analyzing and plotting the course to follow, they developed a genuine sense of togetherness and determination that they could conquer their problems. They sent a delegation to the bishop with a plea to continue with the building project. The members of this delegation were the members of the new committee which were selected at the meeting of February 9. These were: Mr. Casimir Moryl, Mr. Albert Goluch, Mr. Stanley Szczepanek, and Mr. M. Sendulka.

The bishop deliberated, but seeing the sincere desire and strong determination of these people, He allowed the construction to continue, providing the expense would be held to a minimum, by not building a tall steeple. Mr. Stanley Konowicz relates how every member did his share of spadework. Those working in factories at 20 cents an hour, helped after working hours carrying building materials. Many worked 10 or 12 hours a day and nine on Saturday. The financial burden was tremendous, but Father Osadnik inspired the people by personally visiting each family. (We are told, that in many instances, when collecting for the building fund, he would offer aid from his personal funds where he saw sickness and poverty.)

It would be appropriate at this time to mention, as many as memories will allow, who by the sweat of their brow built this House of God. Luber, Makinia, Serafin, Kaminski, Konieczny, Motyka, Bodzek, Schmidt, Niepostyn, Sklodowski, Jasinowski, Zych, Przednowek, Cichon, Pasternak, Okrzesik, Stepien, Chwalek, Ciecka, Kozlowski, Rzeznik, Bzdell, John Gliwa (benefactor of the sisters), F. Belzowski.

After Father Osadnik took occupancy of the rectory, He sent to Pennsylvania for Miss Bernice Klug, who was his housekeeper, and also performed the duties of parish organist and director. She organized the church mixed choir of which we could be proud. The members of the first choir were: Sophie Chwalek (Chmielowiec), Genevieve Niepostyn (Rzeznik), Sophie Repel (Berk), Mrs. Stanley Kaminski, Marie Slodkiewicz, M. Grebenas, Mr. Nice, Mr. Lopatka, Ann Amber, Mr. Sendulka (the voice), and later Mrs. Andrew Reznik and Mr. John Klug. This choir existed until 1920. (St. Cecilia Choir was organized by Miss Olga Klug (Iwanowski) in April 1920.

Dedication of the cornerstone took place on Sunday August 3, 1913. The ceremony was conducted by Most Reverend Bishop Paul Rhode, a personal friend of Father Osadnik, and the first Polish bishop in the United States. A one half mile long procession escorted the Bishop from the New York Central train station to an altar arranged for occasion on the corner of the building to be blessed. The Bishop then went over contents of a box which included the Catholic history of the city, interesting facts connected with the building of the new church, copies of La Porte papers. Also two copies of the Chicago Polish papers, coins, and inscription containing the names of President Wilson, Governor Ralston, Mayor Darrow, Bishop Alerding, Father Osadnik, the committee and the building officials of the church. Following this the Bishop sealed the chest over with brick and mortar. The ceremony ended with the Benediction to the Blessed Sacrament. Many clergy from the surrounding cities were present.

Christmas of 1913 was truly a joyous Holiday. The first Mass in the new church was celebrated

on Christmas Eve, by Rev. John Osadnik. From this day forward, our church bore the name of the One to Whom it was dedicated.

Because of lack of funds to install heating facilities specified by the state, construction on the school was stopped for the time being. However the lack of comfort did not discourage those brave people. A pot bellied stove placed up front was the only means of heating the church. Remember old Mr. Repel keeping vigil over the fire? He also performed the duties of sacristan in Father Osadnik's old cassock. And remember how noisy those folding chairs were that provided the seating?

In early 1915 Father Osadnik invited artist painter Mr. John Klug from Pennsylvania, to paint pictures and murals in the new church. The many talents of this man added much to the culture of this parish.

In 1916, Rev. Osadnik invited the Reverend Franciscan Sisters of St. Kunegunda of Chicago, Illinois to open the school year. Until this time, the children attended Maple School, St. Joseph's school and St. Rose Academy. (By the way, their only means of transportation was by foot).

The living quarters of the sisters were in the back room of the church school building, which was inadequate in size and facilities. (That now is the music room). The first sisters to arrive were: Sr. M. Serafina, superior, Sr. M. Ignatius and Sr. M. Mikolaja. About this time the enthusiasm of the people was tremendous. It was buzzing with many socials, political rallies and cultural activities.

First seven years of existence, the parish committee was in charge of all church business. Mr. Casimir Moryl was secretary all but one year. Mr. Sendulka was secretary that year. Some old pioneers still have their old receipted dues books.

Since July 28, 1914 war was spreading over European nations, and gloom overcast our country. On April 6, 1917 state of war was declared by United States Congress. 'This year, the world famous Polish pianist Ignacy Paderewski, in passing through La Porte, spoke to the Poles from the platform of the New York Central train, asking the people to join in the fight to bring about Freedom to Poland. Due partially to his efforts Poland became a free country, in 1918. After a great deal of sacrifice and loss of lives, the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. That was the year of the great influenza epidemic.

On February 7, 1920 Rev. John W. Osadnik, organizer and pastor of Sacred Heart Church was called by the bishop to head the Congregation at St. Adalbert's Church in South Bend, Indiana. He was replaced by Rev. Ignatius Gapczynski.

Rev. Ignatius Gapczynski was born in Poland on July 14, 1882, to Stephen and Josephine Gapczynski. He came to this country in 1891. He received his schooling in St. Hedwig's school in South Bend, Indiana. Prepared for the priesthood at St. Cyril and Methodius Seminary, Orchard Lake, Michigan, and was ordained on June 21, 1912 by Bishop Herman Alerding. Father Gapczynski celebrated his first solemn Mass at St. Casimir's in South Bend. His first

appointment was at St. Casimir's in Hammond for one year, after which he served six years at St. John's parish, Indiana Harbor, Indiana. In 1918 he became pastor of Sacred Heart Church, Tolleston, Indiana, then he was transferred to the pastorate of Sacred Heart Church here from 1920 to 1926. In September 1926 Father Gapczynski assigned pastor of St. Mary's Church in Hammond and served until his transfer on July 31, 1931 back to LaPorte.

On January 27, 1944 Rev. Gapczynski was appointed by Bishop Noll to the pastorate of St. Adalbert's South Bend, the position he holds at the present writing.

Rev. Gapczynski was honored with the title of Papal Chamberlain and received his purple robes on November 6, 1950. On June 24, 1962 the Very Reverend Monsignor Ignatius J. Gapczynski observed fiftieth anniversary of ordination.

The 1920's were boom years. The parish purchased a house at 501 Park Street, to serve as Sisters convent, for the sum of \$4,500.00. A house was acquired and moved from downtown Lincoln Way to church property, adjacent to the church and renovated at the cost of \$8,000.00. This has been and still is the rectory. The first pipe organ was purchased to replace the old foot pedal organ.

In July 1926 Rev. Gapczynski received word from Bishop Noll transferring him to Hammond, Indiana and assigned Rev. Walter Szczukowski as third pastor.

Father Szczukowski's pastorate in this parish was relatively short, nevertheless he was credited with some improvements.

After 10 roaring boom years, the stock market crashed in 1929, which resulted in the worst industrial depression in the history of the country. Two lots were purchased enlarging the church property. On June 26, 1931 Rev. Gapczynski was reappointed to the La Porte parish.

In 1932 our parish was invited to participate in the Centennial celebration of the city of La Porte. The Bialy Mazur Dance troupe was organized. They distinguished themselves at the Civic Auditorium, and were invited to perform at the Century of Progress World's Fair in Chicago in 1933. Original members of the dancing troupe were: Steve Stepanek, Adam Kuk, Albert Brenda, Bruno Rymer, Walter Gilva, Steve Pierzchala, John Magdziarczyk, Frank Moryl, Harriette Sklodowski (Jagodka), Mary Stesiak (Rudy), Rose Nowicki (Kubiak), Helen Goluch, Mable Lashinis (Goluch), Julia Czauderna (Goluch), Irene Kaminski (Bacziewicz), and Julia Nowicki (Pietraszewski).

By 1933 most factories were closed. Panic gripped the nation. Again the people endured many hardships. Gloom overcast the world, and very little progress was made, since the depression lasted until early 1940's.

An integral part of any parish and community is the entertainment and social life. This parish experienced its share of tear filled dramas as well as roaring comedies in its formative years. About the least attempt at theatrics, which was beginning to give way to other forms of entertainment, was a play presented by the St. Cecilia Choir entitled "The Miracle on Jasna Gora".

It was directed by Helen Goluch, and Bernice Stepanek was the musical director. Remember the thespians who took part?

Genevieve Serafin (Serwatka), Julia Czauderna (Goluch), Sophie Berkowski (Berk), Helen Szynal (Stepanek), Adeline Jasinowski (Serafin), Julia Prusinska, Suzanne Kaminski (Moryl), Genevieve Stec, Leon Kaminski, John Szynal, Benny Brenda, Albert Brenda, Peter Paskiewicz and Joseph Russ. This happened on March 29, 1936.

As the years passed and the parish grew, Father Gapczynski needed assistance in ministering to the souls. On July 7th, 1936 His Excellency Bishop Noll appointed Rev. John Szot to La Porte.

On Sunday June 27, 1937 Reverend Gapczynski observed the Silver Jubilee of his priesthood with a Solemn High Mass at 10 o'clock. This was a first for the Sacred Heart Parish. Father Gapczynski was celebrant of his Mass, Rev. Venceslaus Karp was Deacon, Rev. Stanley Zjawinski was Subdeacon, Rev. Peter Budnik, O. S. F., delivered the sermon, and Rev. Joseph Smith was Master of Ceremonies. The Mass was sung by the St. Cecilia Choir under the direction of Sr. M. Suzanne. A banquet was held at the Civic Auditorium, and a program was presented by the following: Opening speech by Roman Brenda, Invocation by Rev. Joseph Bolka, Rev. L. Bozyk was toastmaster. Address wa

given by Rev. Felix Seroczynski, Diocesan Dean. Others taking part in the program were: St. Cecilia Choir, Mayor Alban M. Smith, Rev. Julian Skrzypinski, Diocesan Councultor, Lillian Sklodowski (Miller), Mr. Albert Goluch, Rt. Rev. John Osadnik was the principal speaker.

In 1939, twenty one years after the close of World War I, another war broke out in Europe. On December 7, 1941 Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese. Many lost lives lives in this most frightful and devastating World War II.

Rev. F. Wojcicki was appointed assistant to our pastor in July 1939, replacing Father Szot.

In June 1941, the parishioners of Sacred Heart, paid tribute to the Franciscan Sisters on the 25th Anniversary of the schools beginning and their tenure as teachers. More than 200 guests extended their tenure as teachers. More than 200 guests extended their congratulations.

June 28, 1942 was a memorable day for Sacred Heart parish, as Rev. Joseph Francis Ciecka. C. S. C. celebrated His first Solemn Mass. Father Ciecka was born in La Porte on August 3, 1911 to Joseph and Anna Ciecka. He received his early training at Sacred Heart School graduating in June 1926. He graduated from La Porte High School in 1930. He worked his way through High School in the Circulation department of the Herald Argus at \$1.25 a week.

In September of 1932 he entered Holy Cross Seminary at Notre Dame, Indiana, and received his degree in Arts and Letters in June 1938. On August 16th, 1938 he made his profession of Perpetual Vows at Notre Dame. He spent the following four years at the Foreign Mission Semniary Washington, D, C. He was ordained at the Sacred Heart Church, Notre Dame, by the late Archbishop John F. Noll

on June 24, 1942. Father Ciecka served as assistant pastor in the following South Bend parishes: St. Stanislaus, Holy Cross, St. Hedwig's and St. Casimir's. At the present time Father Joe is at Holy Trinity Parish, Chicago, Illinois. Sacred Heart parishioners and others who know him, are proud of his accomplishments.

On June 11, 1954 our school again made front page news by winning the Parochial League Baseball title, and the Stan Goldberg trophy. There were other wins, and there were losses. The successes of our school in the field of sports was due to the interest and hard work of our boys.

In 1955 the parishioners with their donations purchased a rebuilt two manual organ to replace the antiquated pipe organ. The chimes were also donated.

Bishop John Francis Noll died on July 31, 1956 and Auxiliary Bishop Pursley became Bishop of Fort Wayne Diocese.

On March 1, 1955 Rev. Walter Pawlicki was relieved of his duties in Whiting, and assigned the pastorate of Sacred Heart Church, La Porte. Rev. Zjawinski was transferred to Whiting. Father Walter was welcomed at a canonical induction ceremony on Sunday March 7. Rt. Rev. Msgr. Edward Vurpillat of Michigan City headed a procession of altar boys and small boys and girls in white, which started from the rectory to the church, followed by clergy. Little Edward Kleca carried the church key on a silver tray. Tommy Moryl carried a purple stole which is a sign of authority. These were presented to the new pastor during the ceremony. Benediction followed, and a reception was held later.

Father Walter S. Pawlicki was born in South Chicago, Illinois on June 25, 1904 of James and Agnes Pawlicki. Completing grammar school studies at St. Michael's School, His studies at St. Bonaventure College, Pulaski, Wisconsin were interrupted by a siege of rheumatic fever. After months in the hospital, and two years of medication, he recuperated sufficiently to start further studies at St. Stanislaus Kostka College in Chicago. He graduated in 1925 and entered DePaul University for post graduate work. Father Pawlicki was admitted to the Fort Wayne diocese in 1926, and he entered SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary for two years of Philosophy. He completed his theological studies at Mount Saint Mary of the West Seminary, Norwood, Ohio.

He was ordained by Bishop Noll on May 21, 1932 and celebrated his First Solemn Mass May 22, 1932 in St. Michael's Church, South Chicago, Illinois. He was given his first assignment as assistant at St. John Cantius Parish in Indiana Harbor. On July 8, 1938, he was transferred to St. Adalbert's Parish in Whiting, and remained there until February 27, 1946, when he assumed the pastorate of All Saints Church in San Pierre, Indiana. On March 16, 1950 he was appointed pastor of St. Adalbert's Parish in Whiting. On March 1, 1955 Father Pawlicki became pastor of Sacred Heart Church, La Porte, where he is presently performing his obligations.

Father Walter Pawlicki's great concern since arrival in our parish has been the spiritual welfare of his charges. He has encouraged frequent communion, and has instituted First Friday Masses at hours convenient to the people going to work early and coming home late. Father further extended his confession services by lengthening previous, and adding new, hours to

accommodate everyone.

Father Pawlicki's dedication to the expansion of the religious community caused an increase in the number of vocations which had previously been at a minimum. He instructed the people to allow their children a free chance to follow their vocations, and to explain that it was no disgrace to leave their studies if they found that they would not be properly suited. The result is that today the parish may claim two young men in Philosophical and Theological courses under the Franciscan Fathers, two young ladies with the Franciscan Sisters, and three boys attending Minor Seminaries

Many improvements were made on the parish property these years, including tuck pointing the church, new ceilings and renovating the classrooms, an addition to the rectory, and many others in order to maintain the church property in good repair.

On August 8, 1956 Father Rzeszutek was replaced by Rev. Thadeus Plawecki. Then on July 1, 1958 Rev. Michael Tomaszewski became assistant to our pastor.

Before this book will be published, our beloved assistant, Father Emil Bloch, will have followed the wishes of the Bishop and departed from our parish for another area of spiritual need. Young Father Emil, who arrived on July 5, 1961, and will leave us on April 30, has been an inspiration to the people, and especially to the young. During his short stay, Father accomplished much in organizing and providing assistance to the youth organization of the city. His everpresent religious counselling was truly appreciated by the members of our parish. On Sunday, April 28, the parish members and guests paid their parting respects to Father Emil by holding an open house in the church hall. Father Emil will now serve the Lord in a Hammond, Indiana, parish.

We are living in difficult and extremely serious times. It is the age of rockets, satellites probing the far marches of space, increasingly complex weapons. The age of science, technology and automation. As our parish continues to grow we again are faced with the dire need of a new and larger edifice.

At present writing the Urban Redevelopment plan is taking shape, and another new crisis arises. Plans call for many changes in the immediate vicinity of our church. A decision on the location of the new church must be postponed. Rev. Walter Pawlicki indefatigably performing his duties in God's Service, is faced with this gargantuan decision.

May the Almighty God bestow upon him, good health, perseverance, and strength so that he may lead his flock wisely in this future undertaking. Thus ends the first half century of existence of the Sacred Heart Parish. The few living, as well as the deceased pioneers, blessed with sterling qualities and strength of character, by their examples have provided us with ample opportunities for leadership and co operative attitude toward our church and country.

A great portion of the credit for the progress which Sacred Heart has attained, must go to the priests who had personal interests in their charges.

Bernice Stepanek, historian