



History of St. Adalbert Parish

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From the Founding of the Parish to the Silver Jubilee 1904 to 1929

The year 1900 ushered in a new century and a dramatic increase of immigrants from Poland. In the northeast section of the city two parishes were absorbing the new arrivals. Equidistant between St. Laurentius Church and St. John Cantius Church lay the expanding community of Port Richmond already served by the Nativity B.V.M. Church, founded in 1882 as the territorial parish, and Our Lady Help of Christians Church, founded in 1885 for German-speaking parishioners.

In 1902, St. George Parish was established to serve the needs of Lithuanian-speaking people in the area. The Polish people of Richmond felt that a precedent had been set for accommodating to the needs of ethnic groups in the neighborhood. In May of 1903, a community meeting took place after which a committee of twelve men was dispatched to arrange an audience with the Archbishop of Philadelphia, the Most Rev. Patrick J. Ryan, and present him with the basic community problem: the old have too far to go to either of the two Polish churches; the young have too far to travel to either of the two schools. Their Catholicity can best be served by having a priest, church and school of their own.

The request was not immediately answered. Church authorities wanted to make sure that community growth would continue and the needs of the residents could not be solved in some other way before permission would be given for the establishment of another Catholic Church in such proximity to two other churches.

The day finally came. On Friday, November 25, 1904, Father Mieczyslaw Monkiewicz, a priest three years ordained, was appointed by Archbishop Ryan as the founding pastor of St. Adalbert Parish. Upon his arrival in Richmond, Father Monkiewicz went to the pastor of Our Lady Help of Christians Church to seek his aid and advice in getting the first Polish Parish in Richmond started. He then went to Andrzej Bogielczyk's Grocery Store and introduced himself to the people he met there. By word of mouth news spread that November Friday afternoon: Richmond will have a Polish Parish.

A house was immediately rented at 3165 Belgrade St. to serve as the first rectory. The first Sunday Mass of St. Adalbert Parish was celebrated on November 27, 1904 in a second floor classroom of Our Lady Help of Christians school. About 200 persons attended. In less than a month, the temporary chapel was moved to the third floor school hall which could accommodate 600 persons.

In January of 1905, a bold step was taken. With borrowed money, ground was purchased on the corner of Thompson and Madison Streets to be the site of a temporary church-school structure. In the spring of 1905, additional ground was purchased, extending the church property to the corner of Thompson and Allegheny.

In May of 1905, ground was broken on the corner of Thompson and Madison for St. Adalbert's first parish building. A wooden church-school combination, 150 ft. long, 70 ft. wide and 14 to 20 ft. high, would serve as a church and a 4 classroom school. Father Monkiewicz, without the aid of any architect, personally drew up plans for this wooden building and supervised its construction. Work was completed within 3 months. On Sunday, August 20, 1905, Auxiliary Bishop Edmond F. Prendergast blessed the new building.

Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth came from Chicago to staff the first school with Sister M. Bonaventura as their Superior. The first convent for St. Adalbert's Sisters was located at 3274 Thompson St. St. Adalbert Rectory at this time was located in a home at 2622 E. Allegheny Ave.

The years 1906 and 1907 saw another increase in the flow of immigrants to the United States. The effect was soon felt in Port Richmond. A 4-classroom school could not accommodate the tremendous rise in enrollment. The only solution was to build a church on the corner of Thompson and Allegheny and convert the present church into a school hall and 6 additional classrooms.

By the end of 1907, Father Monkiewicz invited an architect, Mr. Louis H. Giele, from Jersey City, N.J. to draw up plans for a new church. By early spring of 1908, construction of the new church began by John H. McShain & Co. The cornerstone of the church was blessed on Sunday, May 10, 1908, by Auxiliary Bishop Edmond F. Prendergast. On Sunday, August 29, 1909, Archbishop Patrick J. Ryan blessed the new church.

While the new church was being built, two row-homes next to the church, 2645 and 2647 E. Allegheny, were purchased and converted into a rectory which, up to this time, was still located at 2622 E. Allegheny. As the years passed, additional row homes around the block would be purchased and restructured into much needed classrooms.

For the majestic Gothic church whose twin spires attain a height of 150 ft. it was only fitting to reach out to the artisans of the Old World for interior furnishings that would fit its decor. The stained glass windows are the art work of a firm known as Muller near Hanover, Germany. The three oak-wood altars were made by the firm of Ferdinand Stuflesser in Tirol, Austria. The marble altar rail was imported from Italy.

In 1914, construction work began on a convent for the Sisters. As of January 1, 1915, the Sisters took residence in the present convent-building at 3236 Edgemont St. The same architect, Louis H. Giele, who designed the church drew up plans for the Sisters' home. The builder was John McShain.

Next on the agenda was the building of a rectory. A makeshift rectory existed in two row homes, 2645 and 2647 Allegheny Ave. Again the same architect and builder were used and the new rectory went up behind the two row homes. Once the building was completed, the two homes in front of it were torn down.

In 1918, three row-homes were purchased at the corner of Webb and Madison Streets and converted into a school building which came to be known to the youth of the parish as the "Red School". Except for the original wooden structure which served as a church and had attached 4 classrooms,

specifically built as classrooms, all future classroom space was coming from something that was built for another purpose to be later adapted to school use. The time had come to draw up plans specifically for a school building and put an end to the makeshift, row-home schools. The same architect who designed the Church, Sisters' home and rectory was used. The builder this time was Penna. Construction Co.

Father Monkiewicz now had one great ambition: to run a school building along Madison Street from the Sisters' Convent at Edgemont and Madison to the corner of Madison and Thompson and then a wing along Thompson St. It soon became evident that with rising costs of building materials, this project was not financially feasible. Father Monkiewicz tried to salvage from his plan as much as he could. A school would be built, but not in its entirety. The building would stop abruptly a short distance from the corner of Thompson and Madison. At some later date it would be completed. Completion would come 30 years later under a new pastor in financially less troubled times. The new school building, as it now stood, provided 14 new classrooms. It was blessed on Sunday, April 22, 1923, by His Eminence, Dennis Cardinal Dougherty.

Three Church societies founded in this early period still exist today. The Rosary Society was founded in December of 1904. The Sodality of the Immaculate Conception or Children of Mary, as it was known in those days, in January of 1905. The Third Order of St. Francis was founded in April of 1912.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society, which collects regularly for the needy of the parish, came into existence at some time during this early period. The importance of the group will be seen in greater detail in the years between the silver and golden jubilee of the parish.

Last, but not least, in this first period, mention should be made that Mr. Anthony Jagielski became the parish organist and choir director on May 1, 1923. He has served in this capacity for 56 years.

In 1926, Father Monkiewicz was to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of his Priesthood. With this as an incentive, attention was turned to the church interior. The church was painted. Up to this time, the walls were bare cement as they had been first put up. New pews were installed; the ones we have today. A pulpit was ordered from the same European firm that constructed the altars. The present Stations of the Cross were mounted on the walls.

November of 1929 was fast approaching. St. Adalbert Parish had been but a dream 25 years ago. A magnificent church in the Gothic style was now standing on the corner of Thompson and Allegheny. School enrollment was over 2,000. It was something to be proud of on the eve of St. Adalbert Parish's Silver Jubilee.

From the Silver Jubilee to the Golden Jubilee 1929 to 1954

On Saturday, November 23, 1929, the parish began its 3 day celebration of its 25 years of existence. Saturday at 7:30 P.M. the school children put on a show for their parents in the parish hall. Sunday at 10:30 A.M. a Solemn High Mass was celebrated with Monsignor M. A. Kopytkiewicz, Pastor of St. John Cantius Parish, as celebrant. Father Joseph Niemiec was Deacon and Father John Gaj Sub-deacon. The sermon was preached by Father Gabriel Kraus, Pastor of St. Laurentius. Sunday at 8 P.M. the Silver Jubilee Banquet was held in the parish hall.

On Monday, November 25, 1929, a Solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated for all deceased parishioners. The school children, in shifts, attended a special program in the school hall on Monday between 10 A.M. and 4 P.M. A Jubilee Ball was held in the parish hall Monday at 8 P.M.

In the fall of 1929, while Port Richmond was preparing for the Silver Jubilee of St. Adalbert Parish, terrible things were taking place in our country that in a matter of time would change the life style of this community and the entire nation. The Stock Market crashed. The Great Depression with universal unemployment, business closings and bank failures came in. Father Monkiewicz and St. Adalbert were fighting for survival.

Father Monkiewicz, with the assistance of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, established a food distribution center in the hall under the Madison Street school. Over a lengthy period of time, as many as 783 dinners were served daily. The St. Vincent de Paul staff visited homes, supervised the distribution of needed clothing, provided children with essentials for school, and helped families to pay rent.

In 1934, Father Stanislaus Polityka came to the parish as assistant pastor. He deserves special mention because during the 18 years he spent at St. Adalbert, he left his mark on the parish as a very capable organizer and a strong personality that Father Monkiewicz could depend on as he was entering a period of poor health.

On September 15, 1934, Father Monkiewicz organized the Boy Scouts and the well-known Troop 305 came into existence. On December 11, 1938, Father Polityka organized the Holy Name Society. Before the Second World War when military service would deplete its ranks, the Holy Name Society, as it entered the church on Communion Sunday, was something to behold. Its size, as it filled up the main aisle, was awe- inspiring.

And then came Pearl Harbor. Life in Port Richmond as elsewhere would never again be the same. In 1941, 273 young men from the parish were drafted. In 1942, St. Adalbert Parish had 787 in the service; in 1943 there were 1,377 and in 1944 over 2,000. In Richmond, block after block was decorated in red, white and blue colors as the neighbors were giving a send-off to someone or welcoming home someone on leave. Scattered here and there was a home with a little banner in the window on which there was a gold star. These were the "Gold-Star Mothers" of the parish who had lost a son in the war.

Father Polityka organized a large committee of ladies in the parish to write letters and send packages to the young men from the parish in military service. This "Ladies Circle of Friends of Servicemen" sponsored different programs in the parish to raise necessary funds. Dignitaries from the Armed Forces wrote to this group expressing their appreciation of what was being done by them for the American soldier. Among them were General Eisenhower and General Patton.

On Monday, June 3, 1946, Father Mieczyslaw M. Monkiewicz, Founder and first Pastor of St. Adalbert Parish, died. His funeral was held on Friday, June 7, 1946, with Auxiliary Bishop Hugh L. Lamb as celebrant. A huge crowd lined both sides of Allegheny Avenue as the funeral cortege of countless cars and chartered buses was moving slowly westward on Allegheny enroute to Holy Sepulcher Cemetery. In the background could be heard the sorrowful tolling of St. Adalbert's funeral bell. As the funeral was passing Our Lady Help of Christians Church on a Friday in early June of 1946, an era was ending. It was there that Father Monkiewicz had first come in late November almost 42 years ago.

Father Polityka was appointed Administrator of St. Adalbert Parish until a new pastor would be assigned. On Thursday, July 4, 1946, a Month's Mind Mass was celebrated for Father Monkiewicz. The celebrant of the Mass was Father Francis S. Palecki who had just been appointed pastor of St. Adalbert's.

Using his oratorical skills, Father Palecki rekindled an old spirit that once animated an earlier generation of parishioners but which was dormant for so many years because of the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930's and the prolonged illness of the

founding pastor. St. Adalbert started building again. The dream that Father Monkiewicz had was realized and surpassed. A new school addition was built that also included a modern parish hall. The architect was G. C. Freeman from Reading, Pa. The builder was Frank V. Radomski & Sons.

Construction began in the spring of 1953. The cornerstone was blessed on Sunday, May 30, 1954, by Monsignor Casimir F. Lawniczak, Pastor of St. John Cantius, assisted by Monsignor Peter Klekotka, Pastor of St. Hedwig's, Chester. The completed school and hall were formally blessed on Sunday, September 26, 1954, by Archbishop John F. O'Hara. There were 1,100 children in St. Adalbert School in 1954.

Construction of a school wing was only one phase of a massive building improvement program launched by Father Palecki in preparation for the Golden Jubilee of the parish. Starting with the church outside, the steeples were copperplated. The church was repainted inside and the baptistery completely renovated.

It was in this period of time between the arrival of Father Palecki as pastor in July of 1946 and the Golden Jubilee in November of 1954 that two new church societies came into existence. Father Polityka wanted to establish a sodality for the younger women of the parish. He held several private organizational meetings starting in December of 1949. In January of 1950, the call for members was publicly made in church. By the end of the month the organization, called the Sodality of Our Lady of Fatima, was viable and growing. Father Palecki became its first moderator.

Father Palecki organized the Archbishop's Committee for Christian Home and Family on August 29, 1952. St. Adalbert Parish is the only parish in the area where Christian Home and Family is still functioning with scheduled home visitations.

November of 1954 was fast approaching. It all seemed so unreal for the 80 or so elderly parishioners that assembled in front of the church for a picture that was to appear in the Golden Jubilee Album. They were being honored as the founding parishioners of St. Adalbert Parish. God gave them the grace to see the day when the parish that they wanted so badly would be 50 years old. It had lasted half a century. Their children and their children's children would celebrate the Diamond Jubilee.

From the Golden Jubilee to the Diamond Jubilee 1954 to 1979

It was the day of the Golden Jubilee celebration, Sunday, November 21, 1954. The Most Reverend J. Carroll McCormick, Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia was the celebrant of the 11:30 A.M. Mass. Monsignor Peter J. Klekotka, Pastor of St. Hedwig in Chester, was the Assistant Priest; Father John Sielecki, Pastor of St. Stanislaus, the Deacon and Father Francis Krajewski, Subdeacon. The sermon was preached by Monsignor Edward Szumal, Rector of the Polish Seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan.

At 5:30 P.M., the Golden Jubilee Banquet was held. A program rich in speeches and musical presentations climaxed a day of rejoicing. Unlike the Silver Jubilee in 1929 with its aftermath which was still in the memory of the parishioners, the economic climate was now different. St. Adalbert Parish had reached its maturity. With its complex of parish buildings, its growing church societies

that drew members from all age levels, and so many sons and daughters that entered the Priesthood and Religious Life, it had to cause to rejoice.

As the parish was entering the sixties, certain things, built in another age, were quickly becoming antiquated. The church rectory had inadequate office space for the work of a modern parish. Marble wainscoting in church would not only enhance the beauty of the interior but also strengthen the walls against further deterioration.

Work on the rectory began in the summer of 1963 and was completed in the spring of 1964. Extensive work on the church and old rectory roof began in 1964 and was completed in 1965. A 7 ft. statue of the Blessed Mother carved from Carrara marble on a 3 ft. base was erected in front of the new rectory addition in 1964. The statue was a gift from the Rosary Society.

Work on the marble wainscoting in church began in the fall of 1965 and was completed in 1966. Shortly thereafter, modern confessionals were installed in church. The confessionals at this time were located in front of the church where we now have vigil lamps and statues of the Infant of Prague and St. Anthony.

While all these building improvements were being made, changes in the Church Liturgy as mandated by the Second Vatican Council were being introduced. English in the Mass was first used on Sunday, November 29, 1964. Polish was first used in the Midnight Mass of Christmas, 1964. Mass celebrated at an altar facing the people came in just before Christmas of 1968.

Two new organizations came into existence during this period. The Parents' Guild, established in 1968, has as its objective the improving of communication between parents and teachers. The Senior Citizens first met in May of 1972 with 15 persons attending. They have grown to a membership of 300 and now participate in diverse activities both inside and outside the parish.

On Sunday, May 28, 1972, Monsignor Palecki celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his Priesthood. On October 13, 1972, he retired as Pastor of St. Adalbert Parish, after an administration of 26 years. Not counting the one month that Father Polityka served as administrator of the parish between the death of Father Monkiewicz in June of 1946 and the arrival of Father Palecki in July of 1946, the combined years of service of the first two pastors of St. Adalbert Parish is 67 years, 10 months and 3 weeks. This must be a most unusual statistic, if in fact it is not record-setting in the Archdiocese.

When Father Palecki became Pastor of St. Adalbert Parish, the Golden Jubilee of the parish was 8 years away. When Father Jaworowski arrived on October 13, 1972, the Diamond Jubilee was 7 years away. Jubilees are milestones in the history of a parish. A jubilee can be a catalyst to team up the priests and people of a parish to work for general improvements.

In the summer of 1973, Father Jaworowski started with the church interior. Confessionals were moved to the rear of the church to give penitents more privacy and, at the same time, provide more room for vigil light stands. The beautiful pulpit, which was more ornamental than functional in the body of the church, was taken down and remodeled into a sanctuary lectern.

The year 1974 brought a singular honor to the parish. St. Adalbert Church was selected as one of the city churches in which the special Holy Year Indulgence was granted for visiting designated churches. Chartered buses arrived from different parishes and special services were conducted for the people.

In June of 1974, the church interior was filled with scaffolding. The church was being painted. On Sunday, December 1, 1974, His Excellency, Bishop Martin N. Lohmuller, Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia, blessed the renovated church and was the principal celebrant of the 4 P.M. Mass. Monsignor Palecki and Father Jaworowski were concelebrants. Father Stec delivered the homily. It was a celebration of the 70th Anniversary of the Parish and a reminder that the Diamond Jubilee was only 5 years away.

In the year 1975, the church pews were refinished, new kneelers were installed and the church was carpeted. Two new stairways to the choir were constructed and gates were added on which the Eucharistic Congress emblem was displayed. The rationale was to date these improvements as occurring around the time of a great event in the history of the Catholic Church in Philadelphia. Once the work in church was completed, attention was focused on the school and convent. Much needed modernization has continued right through the Diamond Jubilee year.

Two great events were taking place in Philadelphia during the summer of 1976. In July, the nation was celebrating its Bicentennial. The 41st Eucharistic Congress began on Sunday, August 1, 1976, and ended on the 8th of August. Different events were

scheduled to take place on different days. Monday, August 2, 1976, was a day set aside for participation on the parish level. It was suggested that each parish have an Evening Mass followed by a "Poor Man's Supper", i.e., a very simple meal in the parish hall to make people aware of the hunger that exists in the world.

Monsignor Jaworowski, as Chairman of the Polish Committee of the Eucharistic Congress, invited the Bishops from Poland to St. Adalbert Parish to concelebrate the Evening Mass and take part in the Poor Man's Supper where they could personally meet with the Richmond Polonia. Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, Archbishop of Krakow, was the principal celebrant. Altogether there were over twenty concelebrants. It was a beautiful, cool August evening. As the bishops with Cardinal Wojtyła entered the church in a procession from the rectory and took their places around the altar, a feeling came through the congregation that on this August evening they were witnesses to a great moment not only in the history of the parish but also in the history of the Catholic Church.

Little did they realize as they listened to the Cardinal as he stood in the pulpit that they were looking at someone who in 2 years, 2 months and 2 weeks to the day, on a Monday in October, October 16, 1978, would be chosen by the Sacred College of Cardinals to be the 264th Roman Pontiff, known to the world as Pope John Paul II.

On Sunday, November 26, 1978, at 5 P.M. Bishop Martin Lohmuller concelebrated with Msgr. Palecki and Msgr. Jaworowski a Mass marking the opening of the Diamond Jubilee year. Father Bernard Witkowski, Pastor of St. Ladislaus Parish, delivered the homily.

During the Jubilee year church and social events were scheduled to make the observance memorable. In April of 1979, there was the Jubilee Cruise. On October 13, 1979, Sisters who taught at St. Adalbert and those who came from the parish were invited to participate in a Special Liturgy and in a Dinner held in their honor. After evening services in church, the Sisters met with parishioners in the hall. On All Souls Day, November 2, 1979, Father Edward Bucia concelebrated with Msgr. Jaworowski and Father Stec a Mass for deceased parishioners.

On Sunday, November 25, 1979, the very day of the 75th Anniversary, Bishop Martin Lohmuller concelebrated with Msgr. Palecki, Msgr. Jaworowski and priest-sons of the parish.