



Saint Ladislaus Parish.

90th Anniversary 1906-1996 Saint Ladislaus Parish,
Philadelphia, PA. p. 19-23. CAP at Orchard Lake.

INTRODUCTION

As we celebrate the 90th Anniversary of our founding, it is well to reflect on our history and achievements. We had special observances at the 25th, 40th, 50th, 75th, 80th and 85th Anniversaries, for which commemorative books were published. The earlier books are scarce and probably unfamiliar to many of the present parishioners, so we briefly repeat the significant historical events of the parish to permit all to appreciate and celebrate our accomplishments.

A committee of sixteen Polish immigrants met in March 1904, and collected \$7.50 to start the movement to organize the sixth Polish parish in the Philadelphia Archdiocese.

Immediately, after permission was received to proceed, a temporary chapel was established on Beacon Hill in the "Old Oaks Mansion" at Wissahickon Avenue and Deacon Street. The first pastor was Father John Dabrowski, who celebrated the first Mass on March 25, 1906. The chapel was used for three years. During this time, the corner property at Hunting Park Avenue and 17th Street was purchased, and a one story building was erected as a church, school and rectory. The school opened in 1909 and was taught by three lay teachers.

Father Joseph Gazdzik replaced Father Dabrowski in 1911, but stayed only one year. Father Joseph Kuczynski in February 1912, and within a short time engaged the Bernardine Sisters to teach in the school. By this time there were 700 families in the parish, and the school-church was much too small to accommodate everyone.

Under the guidance of Father Kuczynski, the work of the building church was started in 1914. The building contractor was Mr. Anthony Ziernicki, one of our parishioners. Archbishop Edmond F. Prendergast dedicated the church on February 2, 1916, with a large gathering of proud parishioners, societies, representatives from other Polish parishes, and many guests present at this joyfull celebration.

Selection of St. Ladislaus, as the patron of our church, was never recorded. We know that he was born in Gielnow, near Warsaw in 1440 and died in 1505, after a career of dedicated priesthood and patriotism. He was also a poet and composer of religious music in Polish, at a time when Latin was in vogue.

It took fifteen years to provide the church with altars, organ, windows, pews, statuary and Stations of the Cross. We salute our forefathers for their continued loyalty and support to complete the church, even during extremely difficult economic times.

The final installment of the mortgage was paid-off in November 1950, and on February 5, 1951, a memorable and joyous banquet was held in the parish hall. This payment enabled the financing of a new and comfortable convent for the Bernardine Sisters in 1954, and also the renovation of the church. The school and rectory were renovated in 1955. After a very fruitful pastorate of forty-four years, Father Kuczynski died in August 1956, and was buried in front of his rectory.

Father John Naja replaced Father Kuczynski, and served until 1976 when he became seventy-five years of age. During his time, our surrounding properties were enlarged in stages, and the school, auditorium and rectory were improved. The parish also acquired four homes, on Germantown Avenue, which consisted of sixteen apartments, which were made available to recent Polish immigrants until 1994, when they had to be demolished per instructions from the Archdiocese.

A special celebration was held in honor of Father Naja in 1969. For his hard work and administrative accomplishments, His Holiness - Pope Paul VI elevated him to the rank of Monsignor with the title of "Honorary Prelate." In June 1976, having reached his 75th year, Monsignor Naja retired after being our Pastor for twenty years. As a sign of gratitude, the parishioners honored him with a testimonial banquet thanking him for his many years of leadership and service at St. Ladislaus.

Following Msgr. Naja was Father Edward Pelczar, who was our Pastor for two years. In September 1977, Father Pelczar celebrated a Mass in Polish, at St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia, to honor the recently canonized Bishop John Neumann. This occasion attracted many of our parishioners, as well as those from other Polish parishes. Father Pelczar left our parish in June 1978.

At this time, the Archbishop appointed Father Bernard E. Witkowski as our new Pastor. He served for twelve years until 1990. Prior to his transfer to St. John Cantius Church in Bridesburg section of Philadelphia, he supervised the second complete renovation of our church in 1988. Repairs to roofs, steeples, windows, painting of the entire inside of the church, and other renovations were done as needed to place our entire property in very good condition.

Our school had to close in 1987, in its 77th year, because of a shortage of students. In the last few years, we accepted many non-Catholic pupils, some of whom were black, Korean and other nationalities. After the school closed, the Bernardine Sisters were transferred and the convent was rented to the "Handmaids of the Sacred Heart." The second floor of the school was rented to the "Center of Urban Theological Studies."

In June 1990, Father George Ostaszewski, our Assistant Pastor, was appointed Pastor, and is still serving in that capacity. Mostly, he is performing all duties by himself because of the shortage of priests. Occasionally, he receives a temporary assistant from Poland, which enriches our ethnic character. Father George continues to maintain the good condition and stability of our parish, as well as being in excellent financial condition.

SPECIAL PARISH ACHIEVEMENTS

- To the end of 1995, there were 2,567 Marriages.
- To the end of 1995, 6,409 Baptisms were performed.
- Our school had 1,953 graduates up to 1987, when it was closed. Two peaks of enrollment were 669 pupils in 1924, and 408 in 1959.
- Nine of our young men entered the Priesthood, and one became a Brother.
- Twelve of our young ladies became nuns.
- On June 2, 1991, Francis J. Frysiek was installed as our first Extraordinary Minister of the Holy Eucharist.
- During World War I, 107 of our men were in the military service and 6 were killed. In World War II, 600 men and women were in the military and 18 died in the service of their country. We received, from the U.S. Government, a Certificate of Merit for patriotic work by our parish during World War II.
- In 1966, we celebrated Poland's 1000 Years of Christianity.
- In August 1976, we participated in events of the 41st International Eucharistic Congress held in Philadelphia, PA.
- We participated in the Annual Pulaski Day Parade, and celebrated Polish American Heritage Month until 1994, as well as many other religious, patriotic and civic events, especially those sponsored by the Polish American Congress, Eastern Pennsylvania District.
- We responded generously to all diocesan appeals for food, clothing, and funds to help alleviate the suffering of unfortunate victims of war and tragedy. We subscribed to the Archdiocesan "Catholic Life 2000" appeal well over our quota. For several years, we sent many packages of clothing and sundries to our special "Pole-to- Pole" project during lent.

CONCLUSION

We celebrate our 90th Anniversary not because of its longevity, but to recognize our achievements and service to God and Country over nine decades.

We have undergone various changes since our pioneer founders built the parish. Also, we have overcome many crises such as depressions, changing neighborhoods, wars, declining membership, diocesan consolidation plans, school closing, and the shortage of priests.

Under the stewardship of our Pastor - Father George Ostaszewski, our parish financial condition is strong, our property is in very good condition, and our parishioners are loyal and generous. There is no reason to doubt that we will celebrate our 100th Anniversary in the new millenium, still a Polish parish, which adapted to newer generations. With God's help, we will continue to

serve the church and community, in the same spirit that our forefathers showed in their great example.

The following pages will include the highlights of events since our 85th Anniversary celebration.