



History of Transfiguration Parish in West Hazleton.

Golden Jubilee 1907-1957 Transfiguration Parish,
West Hazleton, PA., p. 17-20. CAP at Orchard Lake.

A colorful and interesting history of the founding of Hazleton serves as the background for the historical sketch of Transfiguration Parish. It dates back 145 years when the first white immigrants settled "the city on the mountain". Despite the many hardships of discomfort, dangers from hostile Indians in the Wyoming Valley, from wild animals, from white renegades, the settlers stayed on lured by the surrounding virginal forests; — the ample resources of coal; — the supply of healthful well water and the favorable location on a summit of 1802 feet. Prominent among those first-comers were: Jacob Drumheller, D. Raikes, L. Davenport, A. Pardee, E. Edson, Hunt, S. Yost, F. San tee, T. Peeler, J. Ingham and R. Miner.

Three of the above mentioned Pardee, Miner and Hunt incor-porated the first coal company in the year of 1836 and by this gave the area its initial move in its main industry. By 1885 the organization of the Diamond Coal Company gave Hazleton and West Hazleton the key position in this industry amongst all the southern towns and cities of Luzerne County.

It was at this time that scores of people of Polish descent made their way to West Hazleton in search of work and permanent settlement. In a short time the community grew into a prosperous Borough. The Polish settlers, however, were deprived of their own church. In order to satisfy their spiritual needs, they had to travel to St. Stanislaus Church which was located a considerable distance from West Hazleton. As early as October 6, 1906 a seriousminded group comprising forty persons met in the home of John Sypek. Confronted by almost insurmountable obstacles the band was determined to realize its goal. So courageous was their venture that we feel our indebtedness to them can be at least partially fulfilled by entering their names into this historical account. It is with due respect and admiration that we submit the following names: Roch Rybarczyk, Frank Betley, Charles Baron, George Brzychcy, Michael Bednarz, John Filipek, August Gatski, George Garbacik, Paul Garbacik, Peter Juchno, Joseph Juchno, August Juchno, Matthew Justofin, Stephen Jachera, Joseph Jachera, Ignatius Kiejrys, Josphe Ksiezniak, Thomas Ksiezniak, Boleslaus Lewicki, Frank Mazurkiewicz, Andrew Marciniak, Peter Nawracaj, John Przybek, Jacob Przybek, Sebastian Pasdon, Joseph Poniatowski, Marian Poniatowski, Adam Poniatowski, John Paciukanis, Walter Rudnicki, Frank Rymsza, Alexander Rymsza, John Sypek, Hyacinth Seliga, Anthony Surma, Ignatius Szydlo, Joseph Wengrowski, Michael Wojcik, Valentine Wisniewski, Thomas Wisniewski and John Krzywicki. Strife and struggle lay before the group.

Accustomed to the churches of their mother country where financial needs were taken care of by magnates, the pioneers were not ready for a completely altered situation in America. It took years before the immigrant Poles of America realized the new roles they needed to play in the new land. Although struggles and mistakes marked the way, a newly-schooled and triumphant people emerged from the confines of pioneer experiences.

The first pastor of the Polish Parish in West Hazleton was the Rev. J. Gracza. Despite the brevity of his pastorate — 1906 to 1907 very important steps were taken in regard to the building of a new church. To meet the immediate needs the church services were held in a nearby public school. According to the church documents Michael Filipek was the first one to be baptized. He received the Sacrament of Baptism on June 1, 1907. Walter Bozyczko and Josephine Rumin were also first to receive the Sacrament of Matrimony on September 3, 1907. The first funeral was that of Anthony Sypek on November 25, 1907.

With the initial step taken, we see another enactment of the growth of similar Polish parishes in the United States. Trying conditions repeated themselves. Lack of funds were supplanted by the fervent spirit of the new immigrants, whose desire it was to keep alive their most beautiful national traditions and to express through church services their love and devotion to God. Besides, the admirable sacrifice of the Polish clergy gave rise to a miraculous perseverance which was a great help in aiding the building enterprises.

The building of Transfiguration Church also incurred its trials and errors. The first procedure of gathering funds consisted in soliciting money on a door to door basis. The proceeds were so small that it was decided to assess each family at \$25.00 and non-married persons at \$10.00. But even this money brought very slim results. It was then decided to take out a loan from the Peoples Savings and Trust Company, in Hazleton at an interest rate of six percent. In addition \$500.00 loans at the same rate were made from Joseph Wengrowski, John Sypek, Theodore Kwitniewski and John Przybek. After purchasing a lot on Green Street a volunteer crew did the excavating work. For a sum of \$7200.90, Contractor L. McDermott began laying the foundation and building the basement of the church.

Incidentally, the original name of the church, Holy Trinity, was changed. This was done at the request of the Most Rev. Bishop Hoban who stated that the duplication of this name for the third time in the city of Hazleton would cause future confusion. After some deliberation the parishioners chose to call their church "Transfiguration". The laying of the cornerstone took place on October 29, 1907 during the pastorate of the Rev. P. Szulerecki. The Rev. B. Gramlewicz, the diocesan Consultor, officiated at the ceremonies.

The following few years brought a change in pastors. The Rev. A. M. Kowalczyk served for seven months; the Rev. V. L. Biczysko for two months; the Rev. E. Sikorski for three years and the Rev. F. Nowak for one year. The Rev. F. Nowak introduced some changes in the administration of the parish. He defined the rights and duties of the parish committee and systematized the entire management. For the next five years, 1913 to 1918, the Rev. Dr. A. Ziebura conducted the affairs of the parish. He so raised the financial status that when the Rev. Dr. W. Kwiatkowski

took over in 1918 he found sufficient funds in the parish treasury to continue the building of the church. In addition to the funds on hand, \$16,932.61, a loan of \$25,000 was made from the Slovak Bank; an assessment of \$50 was placed on families, \$100 on single persons and \$10 on the young folk who held jobs.

In 1920 the building of the church was completed. It was an imposing stone structure with a central tower in perfect harmony with the rest of the edifice. The interior although simple in style displayed a majestic grandeur befitting the God whom it housed. During Father Kwiatkowski's pastorate the parish progressed materially and spiritually.

After the Rev. W. Kwiatkowski left for Poland, the Rev. J. Ziemia served for a brief time until he was replaced by the Rev. D. Tomkiewicz. It was during the pastorate of the Rev. D. Tomkiewicz that the previously discussed building of a school was brought to the fore. But, it was not until the church authorities assigned the Rev. F. X. Dominiak in 1927 that actual steps were undertaken.

The Rev. F. X. Dominiak possessed all the hardiness and priestly zeal that were so very much needed in order to cope with the trying situations conditioned by circumstances of the past. In a short time he made such remarkable progress in the management of the parish and in projects of improvement that when he presented his plan of building a parochial school to his people, he received an immediate response of cooperation. The dedication ceremonies took place on October 25, 1931. Without question, the school structure is one of elegance, beauty and practicality. It remains today a monument that stands as a pride to one who displayed ingenious planning and foresight. For the teaching Sisterhood of the parish school the Rev. Dominiak remodeled a large home and converted it into a convent. Practical in every way, it was and has been one of the finest convents in the Diocese of Scranton.

In the year of 1943 the Rev. F. X. Dominiak was appointed to St. Mary's in Dickson City while our present pastor, the Rev. Stanislaus G. Wolf received the Transfiguration Parish assignment. Although the parishioners felt keenly the departure of their former pastor, they soon noted that Father Wolf in his work for his congregation would add extensively to its enterprise.

Acting in accordance with the wishes of Church authority, Father Wolf installed liturgical altars. The main altar he surmounted with the figure of Christ upon the cross. The new altars although simple in workmanship, are works of art in themselves. Made of oak wood and adorned with exquisite and majestic bronze candle holders and candelabra, they are a source of admiration to all who enter the church. Climaxing the beauty of the sanctuary, "however, is the crucifix above the main altar. The figure of Christ holds so much reality and so much of Divine expression that one's attention is immediately focused on the Minister of the Holy Sacrifice, the crucified God dwelling out of love for us in the tabernacle of our church. To accent the beauty of the sanctuary, Father Wolf painted the interior of the church. Decked in an array of hushed colors it aids the congregation to a more prayerful attitude. In due time, our pastor also recaulked and repainted the exterior of the church. Despite the fact that the venture was costly, it paid in its dividends of insulation and interior atmospheric comfort. With the reconstruction of the tower and the rebuilding of the organ, Father Wolf gave the church another important renovation.

He further improved the school building on the exterior by recaulking, repainting and by installing a new roof; on the interior he renewed the school auditorium and put in a new asphalt floor; made extensive alterations in the cemetery particularly by erecting a beautiful stone altar on the pivotal plot. In addition, he looked after funds in view of building a new rectory. In the very first year, with the good will of the parishioners, a sum of \$12,000 was realized. The old rectory, a building of a century and some years old was by no means suitable to meet the needs of the three priests who now serve the parish. On July 15, 1956 the initial work began. In October, 1957, the new rectory was completed — a credit to our pastor, whose aim it was to provide for a more comfortable and spacious dwelling for the clergy and also to make accommodations for the visiting priests. New offices were also provided in order to insure better service for the parishioners. The new rectory was blessed October 13, 1957 by the Most Rev. Jerome D. Hannan.

The greatest of all accomplishments, however, was the rise made in spiritual endeavors. Frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist and attendance at daily Mass give Transfiguration Church a unique distinction in this city. More than that, this trait of zeal in matters of spirituality spurs the parishioners to a most edifying charity. Although many of the families are of average or even modest means, they are not slow in sharing of what they possess. Only two examples of many others can be cited to sanction the proof. During the time of its erection, St. Joseph Hospital was the recipient of \$9,000, while a sum exceeding \$13,600 was donated toward the Catholic League which looks after the Religious Assistance to Poland. Surely, an unselfish generosity prompted by true love of God must have made these contributions possible.

There is no doubt at this point that we can pause briefly to look back with grateful satisfaction upon the fruits of labor sown through the sacrifices and determination of the good priests and the members of Transfiguration Parish. It is also here that we pay special tribute to the Assistant-pastors who have worked in this parish since 1930. In their roles as assistants they have contributed in a large measure to the growth of the parish. With unflagging zeal they gave a hand with the religious, civic and intellectual factors that meant so much in bringing Transfiguration the name it holds today. In grateful recompense, we give their names and the years throughout which they served our parish. Rev. Anthony J. Kozlowski 1930-1938, Rev. Joseph W. Zdunski 1938-1940, Rev. Felix J. Lafaj 1940-1941, Rev. Stanley F. Gorski 1941-1943, Rev. Francis J. Warunek 1941-1948, Rev. Edward A. Zablocki 1943-1947, Rev. Stanislaus f. Kalinowski 1947-1950, Rev. Francis A. Baranowski 1948-1949, Rev. Edward J. Zawodniak 1949-1954, Rev. Chester A. Gajewski 1950—, and Rev. Alexander T. Kulik 1954.

In prayerful recompense we also present the list of those young men and women who as members of this parish have dedicated their lives to the special service of God. They are: Rev. Francis J. Majusiak, Rev. Edmund S. Penkala, Rev. Andrew J. Krusinski, Rev. Humphrey Tobias O.F.M., Rev. Louis S. Garbacik, Rev. Stanislaus A. Lipinski. Preparing for the priesthood we have Edward Gulas O.F.M., Raymond Grontkowski and Arthur Niewiadomski (LaSalette). In the Bernardine Sisterhood we have Sister Mary Fides, Sophia Szumlanska; Sister Mary Pontia, Elizabeth Skotnicka; Sister Mary Hiltrude, Sabina Majusiak; Sister Mary Francesca, Helen Mankowski ; Sister Mary Joanita, Leona Dudek; Sister Mary Francella, Clare Cieslik; Sister Mary Diana, Claudia Cieslik;

Sister Mary Kateri, Caroline Pych; Sister Mary Coralita, Frances Swiatek; Sister Mary Fidelitas, Josephine Witkowska; Sister Mary Dolorice, Dolores Domin; Sister Mary Helene, Bernardine Potoczna; Sister Mary Judo Marie, Julia Bochenek.

And thus, we bring to conclusion the fifty-year account of a parish where God's blessings were so very manifest throughout the entire time. As we pause in reverential thanksgiving for graces received we also raise a suppliant plea for continued benefits from the Almighty.