Historical Sketch of St. Casimir Parish, Fremont, Ohio
CAP at Orchard Lake, rpis.

In the sixteenth century, Poland was one of the largest and most influential states in Europe. The decline of the Commonwealth of Poland began when its gentry, jealous lest the king become too powerful, refused to grant sufficient funds to maintain adequate defenses against her neighbors on either side who were building up superb standing armies. As a consequence, in 1772 Frederick the Great of Prussia, Catherine the Great of Russia, and Maria Theresa of Austria partitioned Poland among themselves, completing the partition in 1795, thus causing Poland as a state to disappear from the map. From 1795 until 1918, when Poland once more emerged as an independent Commonwealth, the Poles were the citizenry of Germany, Austria and Russia. The hope and desire for freedom and independence never died out in the hearts of individual Poles. During the more than a century of tri-partitioned existence of the Poles, the economic condition of the mass of peasants and urban working men was indeed sorry. The standard of living was low. The opportunities for employment and advancement were far too few. About a decade after the American Civil War, Poles in great numbers emigrated to the United States, establishing large communities in cities such as Buffalo, New York, Detroit, Michigan, Chicago, Illinois, Toledo and Cleveland, Ohio. The language of the Poles and their Roman Catholic Faith bound these people into closed communities.

About 1880, the first Polish families found their way into Fremont, Ohio. These first Polish families were principally from western Poland, around Posen. Among these pioneer families were the Różański, Bednarek, Chudziński, Nowicki, Kaczmarek, Wisniewski, Kowalewski, Klawiter, Wesołek, Surdyk, Kwiatkowski, Wojciechowski, Walkowiak, Graczyk, Adamski, Runskiewicz, and the Florkowski Families.

Not having a church of their own and a priest who knew their language, the first Polish families in Fremont became affiliated with Saint Joseph's Church. Though the Poles did not know the English language, they did understand the German language.

For the benefit of those Poles who knew no German, the pastor of Saint Joseph's Church provided a Polish priest at least once a year. Among those priests who came to Fremont to minister to the Poles were: Fathers Wieczorek, Ruszkowski, Koudelka, who later became a bishop, Kuta and Father Czelusta. In this period of time, a Polish Jesuit, Father Warol, came to give a mission to the Polish families.

After the turn of the century, there was an increase of Polish emigrants into Fremont. This increase in Polish population gave rise to concerted efforts for a permanent parish church and priest who
could help these Polish families in the language they best understood. Anxious as these people were to have a church and priest of their own, the shortage of Polish priests in the diocese prevented the fulfillment of their desires. Not until 1914 was anything accomplished for these Polish families, when the Most Reverend Joseph Schrembs, Bishop of Toledo, was able to send Father Francis S. Legowski to Fremont to be of service to the Poles and to take up a census of all the Poles in the Fremont district.

This census revealed the presence of 105 Polish families and more than 150 unmarried adults. Impressed by these numbers and the existing conditions, the Most Reverend Bishop determined to create a new parish to minister to the spiritual needs of the Polish people of Fremont, On the 13th day of December, 1914, a pastoral letter was read in Saint Joseph's Church decreeing the establishment of a new parish in Fremont, under the patronage of Saint Casimir, for the Polish families residing in and around Fremont.

The responsibility of organizing the new parish was given to Father Francis S. Legowski, who was at the time administrator of Saint Joseph's Church in Marble-head, Ohio. Immediately a committee was organized. At a general meeting called for this purpose, the following men were chosen: John Kaczmarek, Michael Surdyk, John Burek, and John Kalinowski.

There was no serious difficulty in finding a suitable site for the new church. John Kaczmarek and his wife Josephine had dreamed of a church for the community of Polish families and had promised to donate a parcel of land sufficient for the needs of a parish plant, in the event that a Polish parish would be established. They fulfilled their promise with a gift of an acre and a quarter of their land for the new church. The site was ideally situated in the center of the community of Poles on the western outskirts of Fremont, what is now the southeast corner of Lime and Lake Streets.

W.R. Dowling, a Toledo architect, was commissioned to draw up the plans for a combination church-school building, and a rectory. After the opening of bids, the building contract was awarded to Stanley Surdyk, a parishioner, who submitted the lowest bid of nineteen thousand dollars. The construction of the church-school building was begun July 6, 1915. The excavation work was done by the parishioners themselves who donated their labor. The blessing of the cornerstone took place August 1, 1915, with Bishop Schrembs officiating in this public ceremony. The Most Reverend Bishop Kozlowski, auxiliary bishop of Milwaukee was to preach the sermon on this occasion; however, the day before, he became critically ill, which resulted in his death a week later. Monsignor Benedict Rosinski, pastor of Saint Hedwig’s Parish in Toledo, delivered the sermon.

A large delegation of people from in and around Fremont and from Toledo gathered to take part in the public function of the laying of the cornerstone. A procession of people moved from Saint Joseph's Parish to the site of the new Saint Casimir's Church. Taking part in this procession were all the societies of St. Joseph's Parish, Fremont’s "Light Guard", and the Knights of Columbus.

The construction of the new church was completed without undue interruptions, and the first Mass was celebrated in the new church on January 9, 1916. The blessing and dedication of the church took place June 4, 1916. The Most Reverend Bishop Schrembs officiated at these ceremonies. Father Suplicki, pastor of Saint Anthony's Parish in Toledo, preached the homily on this occasion. Not long after, Father Suplicki blessed the church bell, and Monsignor Rosinski delivered the Homily.
In September, 1916, the two-classroom school was opened for classes under the direction of two Sisters of Saint Francis, from the convent Mother-house in Sylvania, Ohio. They were: Sister M. Ernestine, the first superior, and Sister M. Antonia. A suitable convent home for the two Sisters was not available at the time in the vicinity of the school, so the Sisters made their temporary residence in the home of John and Josephine Kaczmarek. Not long after, a home on Lake Street was purchased from Mr. & Mrs. Stephen Wasielewski. This home became the permanent convent for the Sisters, until June, 1967, when the school was closed. The convent-home of the Sisters was sold in 1968.

During the past forty-seven years the following clergy served the parishioners of St. Casimir's Parish: The Rt. Rev. Francis S. Legowski, who was the first pastor appointed by Bishop Schrembs in 1914 organized the parish. In 1918 Father Legowski enlisted as Chaplain in the United States Army and served overseas until the end of World War I. During his absence Father W. Danielak served as pastor until June, 1919. Father Legowski took up his duties as pastor again until February, 1922, when he was appointed pastor of St. Anthony's Parish, Toledo, Ohio by Most Reverend Samuel A. Stritch, second bishop of Toledo Diocese. Father Ladislaus Surowinski was then appointed pastor of St. Casimir's Parish and served until October, 1925, when poor health forced his retirement. Father Walter J.

Czarnecki succeeded as pastor and served until January, 1937. On January 15, 1932, the Most Reverend Karl J. Alter appointed Father Edward A. Zulka pastor of St. Casimir's where he served for twenty-five years until August 1, 1957, when he received his appointment to St. Adalbert's Parish, Toledo, Ohio succeeding Father Walter Czarnecki who died in September, 1956. Father Jerome P. Swiatecki was then appointed by Most Reverend Bishop George Rehring to succeed Father Zulka as administrator of St. Casimir's Parish. At the transfer of Father Jerome P. Swiatecki, Father Sigmund Mierzwia was assigned as pastor on September 8, 1967 by the Most Reverend Bishop John A. Donovan. Father Sigmund Mierzwia passed away on Father's Day, June 21, 1981. Father George Losiewicz was then appointed as administrator by the Most Reverend Bishop James R. Hoffman to succeed Father Sigmund Mierzwia, on July 2, 1981.

During the sixty-eight years of Saint Casimir's existence as a parish the following offered their services to the Church: Father Jerome A. Zieta, ordained to the priesthood in 1932, serving a Texas Diocese, now deceased; Brother Florian Florkowski with the Holy Cross Brothers of Notre Dame; Brother Eugene Lacy, a Franciscan Brother; Sister M. Patricia (Florkowski) and Sister M. Ann Catherine (Klisz), Franciscan, Sylvania, Ohio.