

HISTORY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, SALEM, MA

Diamond Jubilee 1903-1978, Salem. MA



The history of St. John the Baptist Polish Roman Catholic Parish in Salem, as with so many other Polish parishes in the United States, begins with the arrival in Salem of many Poles who came to this country from Poland in search of greater freedom and more opportunities for a better life. Once settled — for the most part in and around the neighborhood of Derby Street — the first Polish settlers began thinking about the need to organize and establish their own Polish societies and parish through which to better preserve and foster their culture, proud history and mother tongue. Thus it was that St. Joseph's Polish Society - a member of the national society of the Polish Roman Catholic Union — was established in Salem, from whence delegates presented themselves to the then Pastor of Our Lady of Czestochowa parish in South Boston, Namely Father John Chmielinski, and asked that he service them as a Mission Station, and attend to their spiritual needs. Father Chmielinski readily and gladly agreed, and so regularly sent one of his assistants, especially Rev. Joseph Czubke, to Salem to provide for and take care of the spiritual and religious needs of the Polish residents of Salem and the neighboring towns of the North Shore.

Having no church of their own, the Poles of Salem requested and were graciously permitted to conduct their religious worship and services in the basement of the Immaculate Conception Church on Hawthorne Boulevard in Salem. Each week-end, a Polish Priest from Our Lady of Czestochowa Church in South Boston would come to Salem and conduct religious services for the Poles, while they prayed and sang in their own native tongue. Among the first Poles to settle in Salem were the Malinowski, Zaborowski and Smerczynski families.



Rev. Joseph Czubek, First Pastor



Upper Chapel

In 1903, His Excellency Archbishop Williams appointed Rev. Joseph Czubek the first Pastor of the Newly-established Polish Parish of St. John the Baptist, Salem. After forming a committee to purchase (at a cost of \$2,000.00) a dwelling on Herbert Street, Salem and converting it into a Church, Father Czubek, amid great exultation and solemnity, celebrated the first Parish Mass on July 3, 1903 in this church of St. John the Baptist on Herbert Street.

As the Parish grew, Father Czubek foresaw the need of a School. Soon after becoming Pastor, therefore, he purchased a building on Herbert Street which he converted into a School, and another Building on Union Street which he converted into a Convent for the Felician Sisters who staffed the parish school. The Felician Sisters educated in an enviable way thousands of children of the Parish over the years, bringing untold honor and glory to themselves and to the Parish.

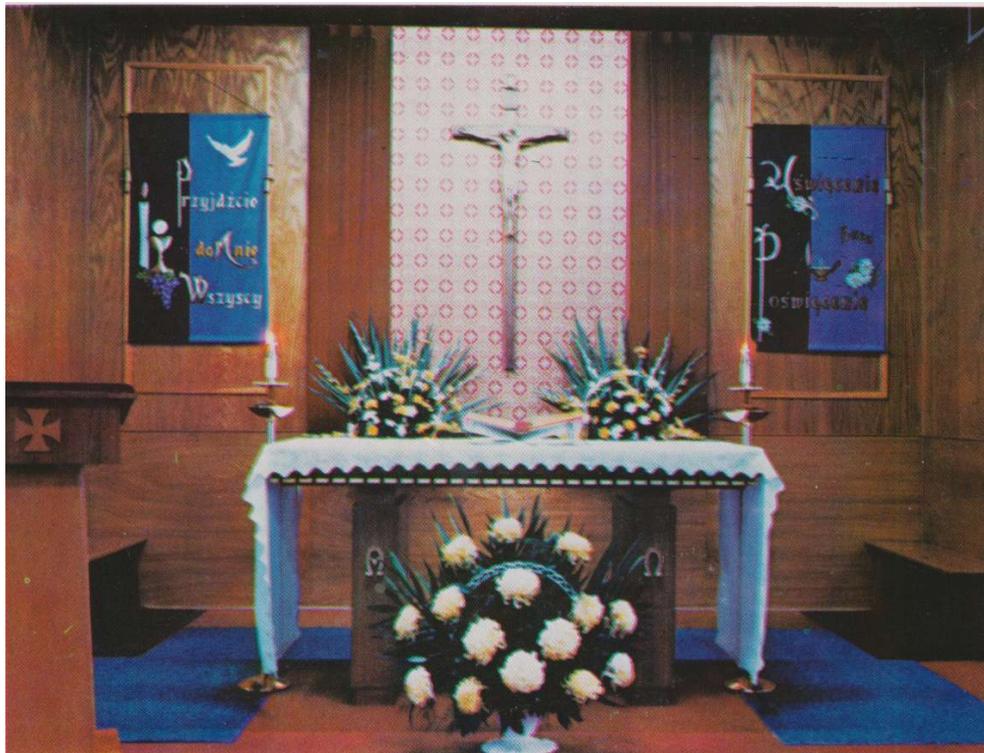


Rev Msgr. Ladislaus A. Sikora, Pastor from 1940-1968

Gifted with fore-sight, Father Czubek also foresaw that the Church on Herbert Street would sooner be too small to properly accommodate the needs of the parish membership. In 1906, therefore, he purchased an old, closed-down Baptist Church on St. Peter Street and, establishing a Parish Committee to raise special funds, began the long, slow process of adapting it to the needs of the parishioners of St. John's Polish Church. Restoration of the Church on St. Peter Street was completed in 1909. From that date to the present time, all religious services have been conducted in the Church of St. John the Baptist on St. Peter Street. Meanwhile, the old Church on Herbert Street was converted into school classrooms.

The history of St. John's glitters with many singular accomplishments which are like diadem jewels in the crown that is placed upon her. On the occasion of the 75 th

Anniversary or Diamond Jubilee of St. John the Baptist Polish Roman Catholic Parish, it is well for us to review and re-evaluate the role of the founding members of the parish. They were deeply religious, hardworking, dedicated and conscientious people. They - both men and women - worked hard, long hours in factories, tanneries, mills and elsewhere for very low wages which seem incomprehensible to us today. Without any government subsidy or welfare program, they patiently and energetically built new lives in their new country, bought and built their own modest homes, established Church, civic and political organizations, and raised their children to be upright, conscientious, deeply-religious, patriotic, hardworking and useful citizens. We are all the beneficiaries of their sacrifices and the contributions of their descendants to our religious community and to our municipality.



Chapel

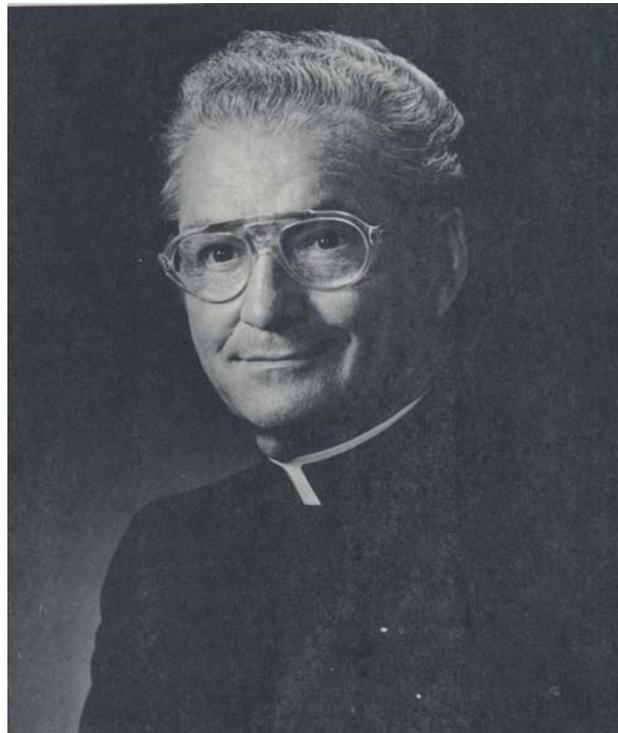
The seeds for development and growth within the Parish were well planted and nourished during the long, difficult, dedicated and persevering pastorate of Father Czubek which lasted for 37 years.

In 1927, one section of the Parish, namely Peabody, so increased in membership as to warrant the establishment by His Eminence Cardinal O'Connell of the separate Polish Roman Catholic Parish of St. Joseph. The seeds of faith were so well planted and nourished that God in His providence had called a very proud number of young men to the Priesthood and many young girls to the Sisterhood or religious life. The names of such persons will be found toward the end of this history of the Parish. St. John's can boast a large number of

religious, civic, patriotic and mutual-aid societies, and a host of her members who have successfully entered the business, military, political and professional field.

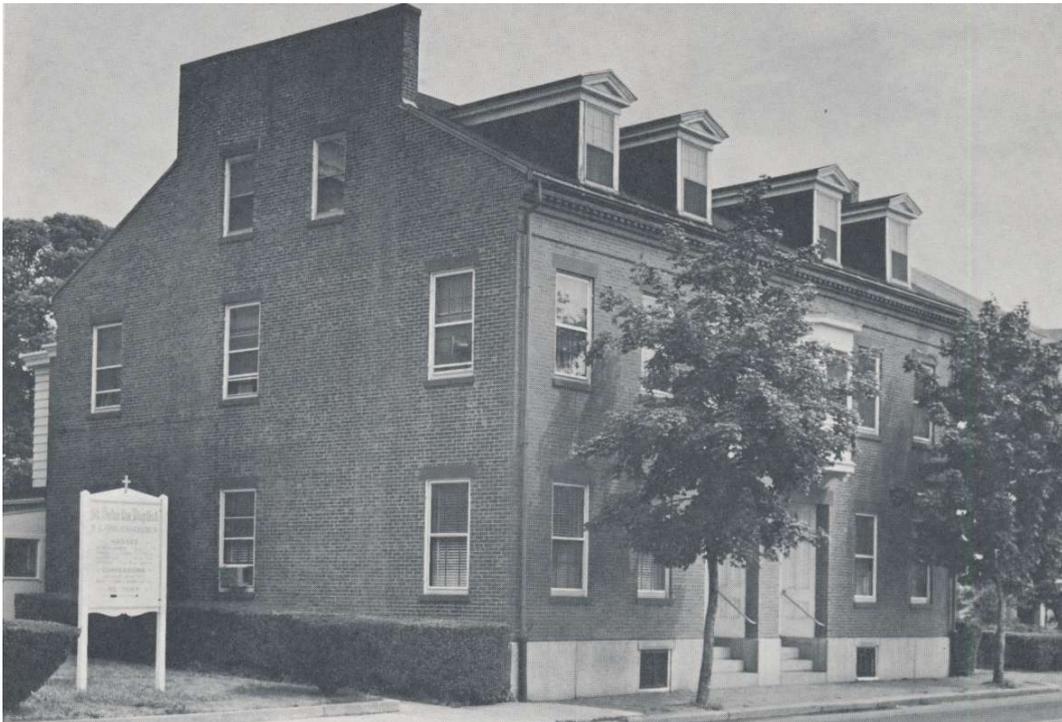
When in 1940 Rev. Father Czubek was taken from this earth and passed to his eternal reward, His Eminence Cardinal O'Connell appointed Rev. Ladislaus A. Ciesinski who remained as the new Pastor of St. John's for the short period of nine months.

After Father Ciesinski, His Excellency Archbishop Cushing appointed Rev. Ladislaus A. Sikora (1940), Pastor of St. John's. Father Sikora was a spirited young Priest who, as Pastor, assumed the difficult task of re-uniting his people and giving them new purpose and determination. His was a long pastorate of 27 years during which time he stirred the hearts of his people and created a great spirit of co-operation and helpfulness. Under Father Sikora, the inside of the Upper Church was changed in style from Gothic to Colonial, and the hall neath the upper church was remodeled into a lovely chapel. The school buildings on Union and Herbert Streets were in dire need of repairs and were finally condemned. With the assistance of many committee-members, families and parishioners, Father Sikora purchased more land around the Church and in 1960 built a beautiful school, and in 1968 built an equally beautiful Sisters' Convent on this land, incurring thereby a huge parish debt. Father Sikora, however, was confident that with the generosity and cooperation of his people and the sponsorship of social functions and activities, this huge debt would in time be liquidated.



Rev. Francis S. Strykowski

Under Father Sikora's pastorate, the front entrance to the Church was changed, and the sanctuary of the Church expanded. Worthy of special note is the fact that while Pastor of St. John's, Father Sikora became the first Priest of Polish descent ever to be raised to the dignity of both Monsignor and Protonotary Apostolic (P.A.) in the Archdiocese of Boston. While these honors and dignities befell the person of Monsignor Sikora, it likewise brought singular honor, glory and recognition to the parish.



Rectory



School



Convent