



Our Parish History.

Golden Jubilee celebration 1921-1971 St. Camillus Church, Chicago, IL. p. 20-2. CAP at Orchard Lake.

In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, we read that in the beginning before God created the world "the Spirit of God brooded over the empty waste." In writing this "Genesis" of St. Camillus Parish, it is well that we begin with that same Spirit, who undoubtedly hovered over the "empty wastes" of Garfield Ridge. We are sure that it was through the Holy Spirit's inspiration that St. Camillus Parish came into being. It came into being, however, not by any miracle, but through ordinary human means. . .

Even though St. Camillus was canonically erected as a parish in October of 1921, it actually had its origin in the year 1918, as a Mission Church, an offshoot of St. Joseph's Parish in Summit.

By 1918, the Argo-Summit area was already an established and thriving community. It had St. Joseph's Church, since June of 1902; it had industry, business, a school, and a lot of people. Its population was multi-lingual: there was Polish, Irish, English, Croatian, Slovak, Slovenian, German, Lithuanian and Italian people living in the area. Most of these people were hard-working immigrants, who came to America in order to escape poverty and oppression. They settled in the Argo-Summit area, because they thought it- was a good place to make a living and raise their families. It was a good community — but it was also becoming overcrowded. The logical direction for expansion was north-eastward, closer to Chicago. So a good number of families (mostly Polish) packed their belongings and moved north-eastward to a sparsely populated area now known as Garfield Ridge.

At that time, the Garfield Ridge area consisted of one precinct, with a registration of 49 voters. There was an average of one telephone per square mile, and practically everyone within that area used it. Imagine getting a request at night to run over to a neighbor living a half mile away, in order to summon him to the phone. This certainly was a wonderful opportunity to practice patience and brotherly love.

The only public utility in the Garfield Ridge area was the street car, which ran along Archer Avenue from the station on Archer and Cicero to Argo-Summit. Although the community was annexed to Chicago, anyone who wanted to travel by streetcar from Garfield Ridge to other parts of Chicago, east of Cicero Avenue, had to pay two fares. The dividing line was Archer and Cicero.

There was no gas, electric, or water lines running through the district. For heating and cooking, the residents used either wood, coal, or oil. For lighting, they used kerosene lamps or candles. The water they used was extracted from the wells they dug in convenient locations. There were some

sidewalks, but no side streets in the area. Wide open spaces between homes were very common.

THE FIRST MISSION CHURCH

The Catholics from the Garfield Ridge area lived quite a distance from St. Joseph's Church in Summit; but they traveled that long distance to attend Mass there. They were willing to make sacrifices to serve God and nourish their own faith and that of their children; but even though they were willing to make such sacrifices, they knew that this kind of set-up could not go on permanently. St. Joseph's was simply too far away. So the people got together and petitioned for a church of their own. As a result of their efforts, permission was granted to start a Mission Church. It was a historical event for the Garfield Ridge community, and it opened up all kinds of new horizons. It happened in the year 1918.

Fortified with the permission and blessing of the Bishop of Chicago, the residents picked out a committee, and commissioned it to look for a suitable location for their new Mission Church. This location was found on Archer Avenue, just a short distance west of Lockwood. It was an empty store, and available for rental. Quickly the committee called a community meeting, and proposed the Archer and Lockwood site for their new Mission Church. All agreed it would be a convenient and suitable site. So the store was rented, cleaned up, and decorated suitably to serve as their house of worship — at least temporarily. It was called St. Florian's Mission (Incidentally, this same building, now remodeled, is the home of J & S Food Mart, owned by J. Opoka and S. Krawiec.)

As soon as St. Florian's was suitably remodeled for worship, permission was granted for Mass to be celebrated there on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Father Thomas Bona, pastor of St. Joseph's Church, served the new Mission with Father Max Warkocki, his assistant. Two classrooms were opened in a hall connected with Zielazny's tavern, located across the street, on the north-east corner of Archer and Lockwood. Two Holy Family of Nazareth nuns commuted daily from Argo to teach in the new school.

SOME EARLY RESIDENTS IN GARFIELD RIDGE

John and Mary Lanucha who had five children of their own, plus one adopted daughter, were among the first pioneers in the new Garfield Ridge community. They built a home at 5245 South Long Avenue. Their children fondly remember the days they used to pick wild flowers on Long Avenue for their Sunday dinner table.

John Lanucha and his son worked for the railroad at 45th and Central, near the old Drainage Canal (now the Stevenson Expressway). Members of the family also recall that there was a tannery on Lockwood, north of Archer. At times, the horses kept at the tannery got away and ran wild through the open fields. Some would frighten the people by coming right up to their doors and windows.

The Schultz family lived in the community since 1914. Two of their daughters, Sister Lillian and Sister Humilianne, joined the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. The Fraczeks also came in 1914. M & Mrs. J. Udziela settled in the area in 1915. The Ignacy Gorecki family also came in 1915. Ignacy and his son John, were among the first Trustees of the parish. John Jr., the grandson of Ignacy, recalls how hard his father and grandfather worked to organize the Mission Church.

The Pakula family moved into Garfield Ridge in December of 1915. Their home at 5315 Lorel had no running water, so they had to go all the way to Archer and Central to get the water they needed. They owned a cow from which they sold milk to their neighbors. They also had a horse and wagon, so they sold fruits and vegetables in the area. Mrs. Pakula did a lot of work for the Church. She mended, washed, and ironed the altar linens.

The Trzynas, Wojnarowskis, Furcons, and Ko-pecs also lived in Garfield Ridge since 1915. John Kopec served Mass in the Mission Church on Archer Avenue. His father was instrumental in initiating the movement for a Mission Church in Garfield Ridge; however, before the Mission became a reality, he died. Although widowed since 1917, John's mother, together with her children, played an important role in the early history of our parish.

Joseph and Lottie Staszak moved to Garfield Ridge in 1917. They lived at 52nd and Mobile. Three of their children began school at St. Joseph's in Summit, and then transferred to the Mission School when it opened in 1918. They all worked hard and gave generously of their time to the Mission Church.

The John Kwasny family came in 1918 and lived at 5410 Lockwood. Although John came from Poland, he learned the English language well enough to teach his neighbors. Having taught his neighbors enough English to apply for their citizenship papers, he even accompanied them for the examination, because they were too nervous to face the Judge alone. The Kwasny's daughter, Florence, joined the convent, and is a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Today she is known as Sister Dolorene.

Peter and Catherine Walkowicz also were pioneers in the area. They came in 1918, and lived at 5218 Lockwood. Their two-story building later became the first rectory for Father Leo Sychowski, the first Pastor. The Walkowicz had a knack for raising all kinds of domestic animals in those days: pigeons, ducks, geese, chickens, rabbits, and even a goat that chased the milkman.

The Kurzawskis moved into Garfield Ridge in July of 1921. All ten of their children attended our parish school. For over thirty years Mrs. Ann Kurzawski played a very important and active role in many parish activities of the past. She organized the St. Hedwig Society, from which sprang our present Mothers' Club. And whenever some work had to be done for the parish, she was there at the forefront to see that it was done. Through her many years of leadership and devotion, she inspired many to give of their time and talents for the good of the parish.

In the early days there were also the Krydynskis, Nykiels, Kellers, Dutkas, Kornias, Waligoras, Labas, Jendrases, Klimeks, Krols, the Frank Babski family and the Mikoses. Louis Mikos was the first organist of the parish. His son Adam, is a member of our parish at the present time. Mr. Laba was our first janitor.

The Zielaznys also were in the community at that time. They owned a tavern and picnic pavilion on the north-east corner of Archer and Lockwood. Mr. Olejniczak was the area blacksmith. The first icecream parlor managed by the Rozewicz family was on the north-west corner of Archer and Lockwood. Stanley Dziedzic had the first barber shop at 5740 South Archer.

These and other families in the new community were faced with a rather primitive kind of existence, devoid of comfort and conveniences. Moving into Garfield Ridge was a real challenge; but the newcomers found happiness in their new location, because they saw in it a wonderful opportunity to

bring up their children in a community that was rich in fresh air and wide open spaces.

NEW MISSION CHURCH AND SCHOOL

The newly-started Mission became an immediate success as soon as it opened its doors. Catholics from all over were coming for Mass. After a period of one year, it became apparent that a larger and more permanent building was needed to accommodate the people who wanted to attend Mass at the Mission. So, for a second time, a committee was formed to look for a new mission site. At that time, the Gaczals, who came in 1917 and settled at 5437 Lockwood, owned a piece of land on the north-west corner of 55th and Lockwood. They planned to build a new home for themselves on that site. It was a beautiful spot for a new church. There was a Clubhouse and Golf Course just across the street (where Midway Airport is now located). Originally it was called Laramie; later the name was changed to Meadows. After a bit of persuasion, the Gaczals agreed to sell their property so that a new church could be built on that site.

Quickly the committee members visited the area residents and took up a collection for the new Church. They asked for one-hundred dollars per family. These committeemen must have been excellent salesmen, because in a short time they collected enough money to put up a new Church. The land was purchased from the Gaczals and, by the end of 1920, the new Church was under construction. The building is still standing today — it is the east wing of our present church-school complex. It served the people as a church and school. The nuns of the Holy Family of Nazareth continued to commute daily from Argo to teach.

THE MISSION GETS A PASTOR AND BECOMES ST. CAMILLUS

Once the new Mission Church was built, the Garfield Ridge community experienced a new growth. As new residents moved in, more and more people were joining the Mission. It was serving more than seventy families. Having outgrown its infant status, there was no doubt that the Mission was now able to make it on its own. This fact was recognized by the Bishop, because he sent the people a pastor of their own. It was also recognized by the Holy See, because by October of 1921 the Mission was canonically erected as a parish. As a parish, it received a new name — St. Camillus. The name was changed because there already was an established parish in the diocese called St. Florian.

The first pastor of St. Camillus was Father Leo Sychowski. Since the new-ly-erected parish had no rectory, Father Sychowski had to look for a place to stay. Peter and Catherine Walkowicz came to the rescue. They had a building at 5218 Lockwood, with an empty apartment on the second floor. It offered adequate accommodations, so Father Sychowski moved in. Later, the Walkowiczes built a new house for themselves next door; so Father Sychowski also took over the first floor and made it a rectory office.

MORE PIONEERS OF THE AREA

When we consider the early parishioners of St. Camillus Parish, we cannot forget those wonderful people who lived northeast of our immediate community, in an area called "Sleepy Hollow". They too played an important role in our parish history. Although we do not have a complete list of the "Sleepy Hollowers" who belonged to the Mission (and later to the parish), we do know of quite a few whom we are proud to acknowledge.

There were Frank and Anna Kosiniak from 4349 Kilpatrick, Michael and Antoinette Jablonski from 4334 Knox, and the Michael Kaminski family from 46th and Kilpatrick. Also from "Sleepy Hollow" came John and Julia Bozek from 46th and Knox, Michael and Mary Dymon from 45th and Kilpatrick, Stephen and Helen Puzio from 46th and Keating. Joseph and Sophie Kosowski from 43rd and Knox, and the Stephen Wesolowski and Bochenek families. Father Anthony Ziober, who said his First Mass at St. Camillus, lived with his parents at 44th and Knox. Joseph and Mary Radaszewski also came from "Sleepy Hollow". At the present time, their two sons, John and Edward, have a business of their own in our community.

Vincent and Sabina Radziwonowicz also made their home in "Sleepy Hollow". Their daughter Clara (Augustyn) recalls well the many sacrifices made and the hardships endured by the residents of "Sleepy Hollow". Either rain, snow or cold deterred them from school or attendance at Mass, even though they had to plod their way through mud or heavy snowdrifts. Clara recalls how difficult it was when someone from "Sleepy Hollow" died. There were no paved streets nor sidewalks— so, in order to bring the body of the deceased to church for the funeral, the casket had to be carried to the railroad tracks, placed on a flat railroad pushcart used for repairing tracks, and then the cart and casket had to be pushed by rail to Archer Avenue where a hearse stood waiting. This kind of difficulty was eased somewhat in 1927, when Cicero Avenue was paved.

Lawrence and Agnes Panek, who lived at 47th and Kilpatrick, had the only Grocery and Meat Market in the area. It was to their store that the pastor used to come on Holy Saturday to bless the Easter baskets of the "Sleepy Hollowers".

Albert and Sophie Gawel also lived in "Sleepy Hollow". They and their eight children lived at 4414 South Knox at the time the Mission started. One of their sons, Joseph, happily recalls the days he used to walk to the Mission Church with his neighbors, through prairies of weeds and mud. Being a husky lad, he used to carry some of the younger children on his shoulders over puddles of mud, both to and from church. In the 1920's, the Gawels moved from 44th and Knox to 5315 Latrobe. Albert did a bit of janitorial work around the parish: it was his job to shovel coal into the furnace during the cold winter months. In 1946, the Gawels celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary with a Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Camillus Church.

Such were the difficulties of the "Sleepy Hollowers". And yet, they bore them patiently, if not cheerfully, in order to be a part of the parish community. Besides making these long trips to school and Sunday Mass, many "Sleepy Hollowers" made frequent extra trips to the church to attend society meetings, choir rehearsals, Red-Cross classes, and to serve Mass. We are proud to acknowledge the sacrifices made by these dear people, and we are proud to hold them up as examples of real living faith.

ST. CAMILLUS BUILDS AGAIN

After St. Camillus was canonically erected as a parish, it grew so fast that by 1923, Father Sychowski and the parishioners had to embark upon a new building program. A new church was built adjacent to the original structure on 55th and Lockwood. And, to achieve symmetry, another wing was added to the west side of the church, matching the original wing attached to the east. The two wings served as classrooms. The new church was completed early in 1923, and the first Mass

was celebrated there on Holy Thursday. The benches for the school were donated by St. Casimir's. At that time, two sisters, Sister Wieslawa and Sister Louise, plus two Postulants, Sister Mary and Sister Cecelia (later named Sister Bonaventure) were teaching in the school. Each teacher took care of two grades. In the rear of the church, but under the same roof, rooms were built to house five nuns. Up until this time, the Sisters commuted daily from Argo-Summit. Meanwhile, Father Sychowski continued to live in the Walkowicz house, until he was able to purchase a permanent residence at 5430 South Lockwood.

A FEW PARISH FIRSTS

According to our parish records, which date back to the time when St. Camillus was canonically erected as a parish, here are a few firsts: Leo Gaczal and Anna Skotnicki have the distinction of being the first children baptized in St. Camillus Church. The first marriage took place on November 24th, 1921. Walter Split and Mabel Norman were united as husband and wife. Father Sychowski assisted at the marriage. We do not have the exact month or day, but in 1921, Charles Kloc, Clara Nowak, and Bernice Laba were the first children to receive their First Holy Communion. The first funeral held at St. Camillus was that of Adam Machota, on February 11th, 1922. He died at the age of 42. The first Confirmation at St. Camillus was on June 15th, 1924. Ninety-five children were confirmed by Bishop Hoban.

ST. CAMILLUS GETS NEW PASTOR AND FURTHER EXPANSION

In 1927, Father Leo Sychowski was transferred to Five Holy Martyrs, and Father Boleslaus J. Kasprzycki from old St. Stephen's Church was appointed as the new Pastor of St. Camillus. By this time the parish was again outgrowing its facilities. The convent was too small, more classroom space was needed, and there was a pressing need for a parish hall, where parish gatherings and activities could be held. This called for further expansion. So in 1928, a new building project was under way. Under Father Kasprzycki's supervision, a three-story structure was added to the rear of the original wing on Lockwood Avenue. This three-story structure satisfied the need for a hall, more classroom space, and an expanded convent. It was adequate for a good many years.

SILVER JUBILEE FOR FR. KASPRZYCKI

On December 12, 1937, Father Kasprzycki (or Father Kasper as he was fondly called) celebrated his Silver Jubilee of Priesthood. It was a beautiful and memorable occasion, surrounded by pomp and ceremony.

FR. KASPRZYCKI GETS AN ASSOCIATE

Father Kasprzycki worked hard, and devotedly served the people of St. Camillus all alone for fifteen years. When Father Menceslaus Madaj was assigned to St. Camillus as its first assistant in 1942, he was a welcome sight to the people, but especially to Father Kasprzycki, who was overburdened with work in a growing parish. Father Madaj served the parish well for eight years.

SILVER JUBILEE OF ST. CAMILLUS

On October 20, 1946, St. Camillus Parish celebrated its Silver Jubilee. To celebrate the occasion, there was a Solemn High Mass at noon, with His Eminence Samuel Cardinal Stritch, presiding at

the Mass. The celebration started with a procession from the rectory to the Church. Boys and girls, each carrying Chrysanthemums, were followed by the Guard of Honor consisting of Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus in full regalia. The Guard of Honor was composed of members of the Archbishop Weber Council and of the St. Joseph's Council, of which Father Madaj was Chaplain. The Knights were followed by visiting clergy and Cardinal Stritch. The celebrant of the Mass was Father J. Lenczyk of Weber High School. The deacon was Father Anthony Ziober, who was born and raised in St. Camillus and was the first priest ordained from the parish. The Subdeacon of the Mass was Father Frank Cabanski. The Master of Ceremonies was Father J. Korabik, also of Weber High. Assistants to the Cardinal were Fathers B. Szudzinski and Vincent Nowicki. The sermon was preached by Father Stanley Fiolek, then Principal of Weber High. Some of the visiting clergy also attending the Jubilee Mass were: Monsignor T. Czastka and Fathers John Fuerst, A. S. Harte, Alexis Gorski, and J. Nezanski. The music for the Mass, which was composed by Father M. Madaj, was sung beautifully by the parish mixed choir. The choir was directed on this occasion by Father Madaj, and Mr. Lights was the Organist.

After the Silver Jubilee, the parish was still growing; but the parish facilities were adequate to cope with the growth. Father Madaj was transferred in 1950, and Father Ed. Wojtecki took his place. After two years, Father Stanley Gruchot replaced Father Wojtecki. He remained at St. Camillus until July of 1959.

FR. KASPRZYCKI BECOMES A MONSIGNOR

In November of 1953, both Father B. J. Kasprzycki and the Parish were singularly honored by Pope Pius XII. Father Kasper received a rescript from Rome certifying his elevation to the Monsignorship. This called for a celebration, so a committee was formed to make plans to honor the new Monsignor in a fitting manner. On February 28, 1954, Monsignor Kasprzycki was publicly feted. Following the Monsignor's investiture ceremony in Church, a Testimonial Dinner was given for him in St. Turibius' Auditorium. The Dinner had to be held at St. Turibius, because our own parish hall was not large enough to accommodate the crowd that wanted to celebrate this occasion with Father Kasper. He was a prince of a man, and was well liked by all the people.

MSGR. KASPRZYCKI DIES

Just three years after his elevation to the Monsignorship, Monsignor Kasper became seriously ill, and was taken to Holy Cross Hospital. On Friday, sang at the Mass. Besides the Cardinal and Bishop Hillinger, over one hundred Monsignors and Priests attended Monsignor Kasprzycki's funeral. Since the church could not accommodate the huge crowd attending Monsignor's funeral, loudspeakers were set up outside the church, so that the people outside could at least "hear" the funeral services. Monsignor B. J. Kasprzycki is buried in St. Adalbert Cemetery.

FR. MACKOWIAK BECOMES PASTOR

After the death of Monsignor Kasper, Father Stanley Gruchot administered the parish until Father Joseph Mackowiak came as the new Pastor in July of 1957. Before his death, Monsignor Kasper made plans for a new school, convent and rectory. He did not live long enough to see his plans materialized. So, as soon as Father Mackowiak came to St. Camillus, he immediately continued the work begun by Monsignor Kasper.

NEW SCHOOL, CONVENT AND RECTORY

Under the supervision of Father Mackowiak, ground was broken for a new school, convent and rectory in September of 1958. The work on the new building program was completed in 1959, just one year after ground was broken. The buildings were dedicated by Bishop Hillinger in October, 1959.

Although the priests, sisters, and people of the parish were happy with the newly-erected buildings, they knew that the building program was not complete. One more building was needed — a new Church. St. Camillus parish was still growing. New homes were being erected on every available lot, and more and more families were registering in the parish. With the advent of these new families came a larger enrollment in our parish school. The school was large enough to accommodate the new enrollment; but the church was inadequate. And yet, there could be no thought of a new church at that time, because of the huge debt that resulted from the building of a new school, convent and rectory. During the following five years, the parishioners of St. Camillus were generous and made many sacrifices. There was a lot of scrimping and saving because everyone knew the parish debt had to be paid.

Father Gruchot was transferred in July of 1959 to St. Mary of Perpetual Help Parish, and the newly-ordained Father Walter Koszut took his place. Cardinal Meyer's recognition of the continued growth of St. Camillus was evidenced a year later when another priest, Father Leonard Bogdan, was assigned to St. Camillus to assist the pastor.

In July of 1964, Father Walter Koszut was transferred, and Father Robert Byczynski was assigned to St. Camillus.

FR. KWIEK BECOMES FOURTH PASTOR

In February of 1965, St. Camillus got a new pastor. Father Joseph Mackowiak left St. Camillus to assume the pastorate of St. Wenceslaus Church on the north side. He was replaced by our present pastor, Father Stanley Kwiek, who came to us from St. Valentine Church in Cicero.

After being at St. Camillus only a short time, Father Stanley was faced with several big tasks and difficult decisions. Almost as soon as the last payment was made on the parish debt, which resulted from the 1958 building program, new expenditures had to be made. At that time the new liturgy of the Mass was being introduced in all the parishes of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Since the new liturgy stipulated that Mass had to be celebrated facing the people, a new altar had to be

set up in the sanctuary. To accomplish this, extensive changes and remodeling were necessary, because of needed space. So, after a great deal of figuring and measuring, a decision was made (reluctantly) to remove the altars which were already weakened with age. It was a difficult decision to make; but it had to be done in order to comply with archdiocesan regulations.

Besides taking on the expensive task of remodeling the sanctuary for the new liturgy, the new pastor had to tackle a job of painting and decorating which was far overdue. In addition to the expense of remodeling and painting, the city at that time decided to pave the street on 54th and Lockwood, for which the parish was assessed \$7,800. The remodeling, painting, and paving put the parish into debt for \$20,000.

But that was not all. Early in 1965, an unusual opportunity presented itself for consideration. With the curtailment of flights at Midway Airport, American Airlines decided to sell the parking lot it owned on 55th, between Lorel and Long. The parish needed more parking spaces, and an opportunity like this would not present itself again. So a decision was made to buy this lot from American Airlines for \$50,000. It was indeed a good buy, because today this property is worth far more than its original purchase price. Once all these projects were completed, the parish was in debt to the tune of \$70,000.

Father Stanley realized from the start that St. Camillus needed a new church; but his hands were tied. First, the new \$70,000 debt had to be paid, and a new Building Fund had to be started. So, under his leadership, new energies were expended to accomplish this task. Great strides were made since that time. Today, after six years of thrifty management and praiseworthy generosity on the part of our good parishioners, St. Camillus is not only free of debt but has a surplus of \$175,000 in the parish treasury; despite the fact that many improvements were made. Perhaps in the near future we can complete the final stage of the building program initiated in 1958 by erecting a new house of worship.

In May of 1966 Father Bogdan was transferred, and Father Charles Osowski came to St. Camillus as an associate pastor. He is still with us in this Golden Jubilee year. Next year, May of 1972, he will be celebrating his own Silver Jubilee of Ordination. March of 1969 brought another change to the parish. Father Frank Ryzner was assigned to St. Camillus as a replacement for Father Robert Byczynski. Father Frank too is an associate pastor in the parish at the present time.

THE FUTURE

St. Camillus today, under the leadership of Father Stanley Kwiek, has approximately 1,500 families and 325 children in the grade school. Besides this, there are several thriving societies engaged in numerous activities to keep the parish alive and ever striving to make some pertinent Christian impact on the community.

Fathers Stanley, Charles, and Frank carry on the work of their predecessors today as St. Camillus parish presses on into an uncertain future of social change and cataclysmic threats; but it presses on, not in fear and doubt, but with undaunted faith and hope. We are confident and we pray that the same Spirit, who guided the beginnings and growth of St. Camillus for over fifty years, will continue to show the way for many years to come.