



**A HISTORY OF ST. CASIMIR'S CATHOLIC CHURCH:
1910-1994** (Queen of Peace Chapel), Cloquet, MN
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As was the case in so many communities in northern Minnesota at the turn of the 20th century, European immigrants of many nationalities found their way to Cloquet to begin their life in the New World. Most of these people were hard-working laborers who sought employment in the lumber camps and sawmills which dotted the area. The Polish people, like those of other nationalities when they first arrived in Minnesota, tended to band together socially. For the Poles in Cloquet, their strong ties with the Catholic Church made the Church the natural focal point of their common heritage. To get a Polish-speaking priest who could hear confessions in their native tongue was an early objective of this group.

In the early 1900s, the Polish people of this area met on Sundays in Scanlon and were served by temporary priests from around the area. That early church was a small wooden structure much resembling the little white Lutheran church presently located in Scanlon on Washington Avenue. When the Brooks-Scanlon Lumber Company closed, releasing laborers from that area, the little church building was moved to a site on 11th Street about two blocks north of the present church.

The first priest assigned to the Polish people in the area was Father Iciek, who served a little more than a year beginning November 11, 1908. He was followed by Father Malecki, who, on January 20, 1910, had the parish incorporated and named St. Casimir's Roman Catholic Church. Following Father Malecki were Father Osadnik and Father Cieminski. In 1913 Father Schultz was named pastor, followed by Father Szczukowski in 1915. (For a complete listing of former pastors, see Appendix I).

The church on 11th Street burned in the Cloquet fire of 1918 and was never rebuilt. For a short time after the fire, Polish people attended the improvised "French" church as Our Lady of the Sacred Heart was known. The parishioners of St. Casimir's historically fraternized very little with parishioners from the French church, a situation which, to a lesser extent, carried over for decades. The basis for this schism is unknown, although old timers tell of not being welcomed by the French church parishioners following the 1918 fire.

During this time, a decision was made to construct a larger Polish church, and four lots were purchased on the corner of 10th Street and Carlton Avenue for St. Casimir's new location. Included in the four lots was what was left of the foundation of the old McQuithey home. The old foundation was cleaned up and a temporary roof erected so it could be used as a church until the new building could be designed, funded, and built. Serving the parish during these trying years was Father Olszewski, Father Meger, who later was to return again as pastor, and Father Werbila.

The people of the parish really worked hard during the years of church construction. Mr. Schnur was engaged as general contractor, but much of the work was donated by members of the parish. The basement was dug by horse and scrapers, aided by wheelbarrows and hand shovels.

Although the exact date of the first Mass in the new church building is unknown, it is believed to have been in late 1922 or early 1923. Father Cieslewicz served the parish at that time. He will be remembered for his deep melodious singing voice.

During the early years, St. Casimir's priests boarded out in various homes of the parish. It was not until about 1927 that a rectory was completed next to the church building. Father Joseph Kralisz was assigned to the parish in 1924 and had the longest tenure of any priest in the parish history-over 20 years. During his pastorate, the parish blossomed and grew. In 1930, there were approximately 80 families-all of Polish ancestry, for to be eligible for membership, Polish origin was a prerequisite. This regulation was written in the original parish by-laws but was deleted in about 1965.

One of the customs of the early days was the use of "Confession Cards." These cards were stamped with the official seal of the parish and were given at the beginning of Lent to each member who had made First Communion. Upon hearing confession, the priest would collect the parishioners' cards as a check on who was making "Easter Duty."

Another parish custom was the celebration of St. Casimir's Day on March 4th. Parishioners were exempt from Lenten regulations for that day, and elaborate special services were conducted, usually involving 24-hour devotions ending with festive services carried out by a number of visiting Polish priests.

As is the case with most churches, money was of concern to the growing congregation. The early parish used a monthly assessment system. Each family was to pay \$2.00 per month "pew rent" and was assigned a specific pew for seating. Each family also paid \$1.00 annually for fuel for the church. In the beginning, money collectors went around every month to each home to make these collections. This payment schedule remained in effect until about 1950.

In 1945, there were 110 paying members on the church rolls. Total receipts for that year were \$3,682.00, whereas expenditures, including \$1,500.00 for pastor's salary, totaled \$3,292.00. This receipt-expenditure level was typical of the period from 1930 to 1950.

There were a number of very dedicated leaders among the early parishioners. At the risk of offending worthy members whose names might inadvertently be omitted, some of these early families will be mentioned. Perhaps the most dedicated of the

early pillars of the parish was Ignatius Zieliński. Mr. Zieliński was a bachelor who worked at the paper mill. He contributed generously during the time the church was being built and, among other things, donated the ornate main altar which was replaced by the plain table altar following Vatican II. Upon his death, Mr. Zieliński willed his entire estate to the church. This was sufficient to pay off the mortgage, paint the inside and outside of the church, pour a concrete floor in the basement, install three ornate glass windows, erect new Stations of the Cross, plus other smaller projects. St. Casimir's has never had financial problems since Mr. Zieliński made this bequest. (For detailed financial highlights of St. Casimir's Parish, see Appendix II.)

Other notable early parish families include Marciniak, Babitz, Maron, Jankowski, Pasek, Swiercieski, Greczyk, Guzinda, Hylinski, Karulak, Kolodge, Nagórski, Vnuk, Obeidzinski, Tillman, Żelazny, Price,

Sedor, Wisneski, Berlik, Buczyński, Czock, Klyster, Kulus, Wujkowski, Witkowski, Malecki--and who can forget Mr. Rybicki, who for decades single-handedly did all the collecting during masses and all money-counting for the parish? Many of these names are familiar today because some of the descendants of these early parishioners are active in current church affairs.

Women have played important roles since the earliest days of the church. What old timer can forget Tekla Bielkiewicz (sister of Mr. Zieliński), who forever did the linens and the altar cloths, swept, dusted and otherwise kept the church neat and tidy and, when occasion called for it--hobbled up to the front pews to tweak the ears of whispering or giggling youngsters who were required to sit up front. Or who can forget the lovely organ music of Mrs. Yetka or the operatic soprano voice of Mrs. Klejwa?

The early parish was comprised heavily of mill workers, with very few merchants or professional people. These parishioners had a deep-seated feeling for their religion and for their families. But not all was work and prayers. Church organizations played an important role in the social life of the parish.

For the women, a "Women's Sodality" was organized in 1924 and was later to be known as the Rosary Society. This group was responsible for many social activities and, more importantly, gave generously of its time and money for the benefit of the parish. A Holy Name Society for young adults was organized in the Thirties but never was a viable organization.

One of the notable organizations was the Polish Men's Club organized in 1936 with Val Marciniak as the first president. Club membership included a form of insurance designed to aid the sick and help bury the dead. The initiation fee was \$1.00, with monthly dues set at 25 cents--later raised to 30 cents. Benefits for the sick were \$1.00 per day and \$50.00 was given to help defray funeral expenses. From its beginning until after World War II, this club had a significant influence on the social life of the parish. Fourth of July bingo, Star Club, and Chub Lake Pavilion dances were examples of activities provided. These outings were the forerunners of annual parish picnics and bazaars. Because of waning membership, the Men's Club was dissolved

in 1964. In the early Fifties, the parish supported a Polish Girl Scout Club which functioned very successfully for several years.

Athletic events also figured in early church life. In the Thirties, the parish supported a St. Casimir's basketball team--with red and white suits and all. The captain of this team was Tony Mackai and team members included Mike Marciniak, Bennie Jankowski, Stan Wisneski, Victor Cheski, and Leonard Matlock. The team played against such worthy opponents as Esko Corner's Future Farmers of America, a team from Cotton, the Friars of Duluth, and once had the dubious pleasure of being shellacked by a Catholic team from the Twin Cities.

This same group of activists also developed a theater group that put on plays in Cloquet and Duluth. Dr. A.W. Pasek and Mrs. Stan Dunaiski were featured in one such event.

One aspect of the parish community was lacking--that of providing young men and women for religious life. Although the parish had been served by some 23 priests, it never sent even one of its sons to be a priest, and only three of its daughters became nuns. Two women were from the LaBud family, the third was from the Jankowski family. In the mid-Eighties, Robert Szyman, a transfer to St. Casimir's from the Chicago area, was ordained as a Deacon in the Duluth Diocese and serves

the Catholic community in the Cloquet area.

At first, Polish was the only language spoken at St. Casimir's. During the early years Father Kralisz taught Polish on Saturday afternoons in the rectory basement. As years passed, more and more English was introduced in the sermons until, in the early Fifties, Father Meger, who served the parish from 1944 to 1958, gradually discontinued Polish sermons. The last Polish-speaking priest was Father Kuras who served from 1958 to 1967. Polish hymns were discontinued along with Polish sermons although, on occasion, Kolendy (Polish carols) were sung during the Christmas season.

Regarding Christmas, mention must be made of the pomp and ceremony of the early Midnight Masses. About a dozen or more altar boys with their red and white vestments and high celluloid collars and gold braid would help serve Mass. The altar would be jammed with lighted trees and the manger scene. Long before midnight there would be standing room only in St. Casimir's. About 11:30 p.m., the organ would start playing, accompanied by violins played by Andy Buczynski and Joe Jacobs. The choir, joined by dozens of jolly young volunteers in the midst of having a merry Christmas, would literally make the rafters ring with their rendition of "Dzisiaj Bethlajem."

By 1955, there were about 200 paying members of the parish. Total income for that year was \$6,616.00 and expenses were \$6,993. Beginning in 1960, along with general inflation, annual income began to increase substantially. At first the added

money was spent for much needed repairs to the church and rectory to keep the buildings in good condition. New pews and rugs were installed, partitions hung in the basement to permit privacy in religious classes, and general painting and refurbishing was done. The sum of these expenditures exceeded \$100,000, several times the original cost of the buildings.

During Father Kaster's tenure (1971-1978), there was a hiatus in church building improvements, whereas, at the same time, double-digit inflation occurred. During this period, contributions exceeded expenditures by from ten to fifteen thousand dollars annually. The result was that the parish increased its investments from \$4,500 in 1970 to \$119,000 in 1978.

The several pastors who followed Father Kaster found a need for extensive expenditures which, during the Eighties, totaled over \$140,000. These included a new organ, kitchen remodeling, tuck-pointing brickwork, an elevator, blacktopping, etc. These expenditures, together with lower return on investments, resulted in a net decline in the total cash reserves. For fiscal 1989, the last year for which finances were recorded for St. Casimir's, a balance of \$98,000 was shown in the investment account and \$2,701.00 in checking.

After Vatican II, the parish accepted its new role in the life of the church with major changes, not only in the liturgy, but in virtually every aspect of traditional church life. As in Catholic churches everywhere, the front altar was replaced with a plain table altar, the English Mass was adopted, young people with guitars sang their songs, women aided the priest as Lay Ministers and Lectors, everyone went to Communion, steaks were eaten on Friday, women no longer wore hats in church, Sunday Benediction services were rare.

Nothing remained the same-and yet, nothing really changed in the faith and devotion of the parishioners.

In 1988 Bishop Brom asked the two Catholic parishes in Cloquet to consider some form of merger due to the inability of the Diocese to continue to provide two priests for the Cloquet area. As

expected, this announcement was met with great apprehension, particularly by St. Casimir's people. St. Casimir's was the smaller of the two parishes (350 Vs. 914 families). However, talks did proceed, and a number of committees were formed to consider various options. The result was that, in accord with the Bishop's request, final incorporation of the two parishes took place on July 17, 1990, with Father Seamus Walsh as resident pastor. The name of the merged parishes was changed to "Queen of Peace" with the larger building known as the "Church" and old St. Casimir's as the "Chapel."

Following the merger, the united congregation began to adjust to the new situation. Each weekend, two Masses were said in the Church one at 5 p.m. on Saturday and a second on Sunday morning at 10:30 a.m. The 8 a.m. Sunday Mass

was celebrated in the Chapel. One Priest, Rev Seamus Walsh, and one Deacon, Mr. Robert Szyman, served the parish.

The rectory at the Chapel housed the youth director and youth activities. Various functions were held in the basement of the Chapel, including dinners, various meetings, funeral luncheons, and the annual Polish Dinner. The parish offices were in the old convent building adjacent to the Church, although that building was in a dangerous state of disrepair. The Queen of Peace School was housed in the section of the Church designated for that purpose.

Although the new Mass schedule and building usage seemed the best compromise, they did not satisfy many older members of St. Casimir's who felt somewhat disenfranchised by the merger. Because Bishop Brom supported the continued use of both the Church and Chapel, no overt action was taken at that time to change this. Managing the enlarged parish with two sets of buildings with but one Priest and one Deacon seemed unwise to many parishioners, and it was apparent to most that eventually the Chapel should be closed.

In 1992 the Parish Council decided to look into the feasibility of making several major improvements to the Church building including (1) Replacing the offices in the old convent building with a safe structure, (2) Constructing an all-purpose hall to be used for large gatherings and for school recreation, (3) Adding a "gathering space" near the entrance of the church, and (4) Providing meeting rooms and, perhaps, a small chapel.

A special committee researched, designed, and proposed a new addition to the Church to meet these needs. Estimated cost was set at \$1.7 million. Fund raising was undertaken, and pledges and donations totaled \$900,000 initially with \$250,000 coming later. Building contracts were let, and construction began. Parish offices were moved temporarily to the Chapel rectory and the old office building (convent) was razed.

In the summer of 1993, Father Walsh was approached by Rev. Robert Shutes, pastor, with an offer from the Cloquet Apostolic Church to purchase the Chapel. A tentative offer of \$150,000 was made.

The Queen of Peace Parish Council and Finance Council were interested in considering this, and a committee approached Bishop Schwietz, seeking approval. After meeting with parishioners of Queen of Peace and with church authorities, the Bishop approved the sale. The final price was set at \$150,000 plus an additional \$15,000 for the organ.

Mementos from the Chapel, including Stations of the Cross, kitchen equipment, etc., were transferred to the Church. Transference of the ornate windows to the new

addition at the Church was considered, but the windows were deemed to be too fragile to be moved. As was anticipated, the sale of the Chapel building met with a measure of disappointment by many of the former St. Casimir's parishioners. Selling a place of worship for which so many had labored so hard for many years could not be accepted without a feeling of nostalgia and frustration. However, many parishioners were consoled by the knowledge that the initial mission of the church's founders had been successfully accomplished and there was no longer a need for a Polish-speaking priest. Two things made the change inevitable: (1) The inability of the Diocese to provide a separate priest for St. Casimir's, and (2) The parishioners could now be readily assimilated into the expanded Queen of Peace Church. So the sale was consummated and the final Mass said at the Chapel was on Sunday, May 29, 1994, at 8 a.m.

Thus ends the final chapter of St. Casimir's Roman Catholic Church in Cloquet. Those of us who were members and were closely associated with that parish will always cherish fond memories of that congregation - and of that building. In fact, the old St. Casimir's structure of mortar and brick - no matter what use may be made of it - - will henceforth always remain a monument to the Polish pioneers of the Cloquet area.

The dedication of the new addition to the Queen of Peace Church was conducted on June 5, 1994, at 4 p.m. with Bishop Schwietz officiating. It is hoped that the expanded facilities in the Church will tend to further unite all Catholics in the Cloquet area.

APPENDIX 1

ST. CASIMIR'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, CLOQUET, MINNESOTA, Incorporated January 28, 1910:
James McGolrick; Joseph F. Buh; Theo Małeck; Joseph Klimowicz; Edward Szymański.

Cloquet, Minnesota-Carlton County PASTORS

Rev. S. A. Iciek	att.	11/11/08-1 /2/10
Rev. Thomas F. Małeck	pas	1/2/10-6//10
Rev. John Osadnik	pas	10//10-1 //13
Rev. J. F. Cieminski	adm.	1//13-7 /16/13
Rev. Francis T. Schultz	pas	7/16/13-4 /27/15
Rev. A. V. Szczukowski	pas	4/27/15-10/10/18
Rev. Francis T. Schultz	adm.	10/10/18- 9/10/19
Rev. Frank Olszewski	adm.	9/10/19-11//20
Rev. Stanley T Meger	att	11//20-4//21
Rev. Adam A. Werbila	pas	4//21- 7/23/23
Rev. C. A. Cieslewicz	att.	7/23/23- 3/ 4/24
Rev. Joseph Kralisz	pas	3/11/24-10/12/44
Rev. Stanley T. Meger	pas	10/12/44- 2/20/58
Rev. Felix T. Kuras	pas	2/20/58- 9/6/67
Rev. Gerald J. LaPatka	pas	9/ 6/67- 3/17/71
Rev. Alfred Kaster	pas	3/17/71- 7/15/78
Rev. Dennis Puhl	pas	7/15/78- 5/ 1/80
Rev. Eamon Boland	pas	11/1/80-7/1/86

	Temp. Res.
Rev. Joseph Balenc	
Rev. Dale Nau	pas 7/ 1/86- 7/15/87
Rev. Patrick Moran	pas 7/15/87- 7/17/88
Rev. Jon Wild	pas 7/17/88- 7/11/89
Rev. Seamus Walsh	pas 7/11/89- 5/29/94

St.Casimir's Church, Cloquet. Amended May 5, 1962, Francis J. Schenk; George a. Gallik, Felix T. Kuras; Frank Joseph Gresczyk; Leo Swierceski.