



DOWN MEMORY LANE 1913-1988.

75 Anniversary 1913-1988 St. Adalbert's Church,
Farrell, PA, p.12-15. CAP at Orchard Lake.

It was the turn of the century. The town was then South Sharon, the people were Polish immigrants. Employment opportunities were abundant in the thriving towns of the industrial Shenango Valley, attracting many people who were eager to work hard and make a success of their new lives in America. To those of us who look back, life with so much promise sounds almost too good to be true, but in reality they were not easy times. Far from their homeland and native tongue, these fledgling immigrants struggled with difficulty for economic independence, to learn a new language, to be part of a strange culture. Uprooted from all that was familiar and gave security to their lives, often separated from family and friends, they found courage and strength in their Catholic faith.

Sometimes alone and frightened, the eyes of these immigrants filled with tears as they sang in Polish, "Where shall we seek our solace in distress? Where shall we turn whom sin and guilt oppress?" Through their tears, they saw clearly the answer — they would turn to the Church, their Beloved Mother.

Anxious to have a church of their own, one in which they could pray, sing and worship in their beloved Polish language — one in which they could feel at home — a delegation of Polish people went to Erie in 1910 with a dream. There, far from Farrell, they visited Msgr. Andrew Ignasiak at St. Stanislaus Parish, the mother of Polish parishes in our Diocese. They shared with him excitedly their dream and received from him a blessing and encouragement to make the dream a reality. With great enthusiasm and devotion they returned home, the very first steps had been taken to begin a parish here for the Polish people. In the meantime, our people would worship at St. Joseph's in Sharon and at St. Ann's and St. Elizabeth's Church, whose records contain the names of many Polish people baptized there. Travelling by train from Erie, Fathers Ignasiak and Robaczewski would visit Farrell and hear the peoples' confessions in Polish at Christmas and Easter times.

By September of 1912, the vision of our own church was close to reality and the name of the patron saint was chosen. Henceforth, from that day in September, this church, first only a dream in the minds and hearts of the people and now a reality, was to be known as St. Adalbert's Polish Roman Catholic Church.

The members of the Church's first committee, Joseph Usnarski, Martin Dolata, Stephen Włodarski, Frank Włodarski, Casimir Jimro, and Stephen Kacerski, were extremely eager and ambitious men. On January 23, 1913, they purchased property (five vacant lots from Carnegie Steel Co.) on Fruit Avenue in Farrell, and on September 15, 1913, the cornerstone for the church was laid during a ceremony with Rev. Andrew Ignasiak and Rev. Casimir Rybinski, the first pastor. That same year,

the church was completed and rang with song and the ceremonies of its first service on Christmas Day! As testimony to this fact, Christmas Day remains until this time, the most joyous of all days in our Parish. The songs sung in Polish on Christmas Day in 1913 are sung even today! Eight months later, the official dedication took place with the Most Reverend Bishop John Fitzmaurice officiating on August 16, 1914.

Although some records indicate that the Rectory was completed in August of 1914 — it seems almost certain that it was begun even before the church. One parishioner, then an altar boy, remembers leaving the front door of the Rectory with the Bishop to lay the cornerstone for the church.

Eager not only to worship together — our young immigrant families were also anxious for their children to receive a Catholic education. And so, even before the school was built, classes were conducted in the basement of our church. There was only one classroom. Miss Frances Kornarski of Cleveland, Ohio taught all the classes in September of 1914. She was also organist, choir director and Rectory housekeeper. Soon, however, a four-room school was built. The school was completed and the first classes were held in September of 1917. From that day on, because of the sacrifices and foresight of our first parishioners, hundreds of young people would grow in faith and wisdom, learn the Polish language and culture and go forth from the doors of St. Adalbert's School to be leaders in our Church, community and families.

First staffed by the Franciscan Sisters, from 1917-1920, our School was later staffed by the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, who lived in the convent built in 1918 at 1039 Fruit Avenue. Many people remember fondly the days at St. Adalbert's with the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth and stories abound about these tough, but gentle women who formed the lives of so many young people. Names such as Sr. M. Alphonsa, Sr. M. Leonida, Sr. M. Gratiana, Sr. M. Anselma, Sr. Mary Rosella, Sr. M. Thomasine, Sr. M. Honesta, Sr. M. Leonille, Sr. M. Genevieve, Sr. Mary Noel, bring a smile and a tear to many!

In 1916, 20 acres of land were purchased on the Sharon-New Castle Road, adjoining Farrell City Park. This land was to become Holy Cross Cemetery. It was dedicated by Father Ignasiak on the 4th of July in 1917 and has served since as a resting place for our beloved faithful departed.

These were proud and glorious days in the history of our Parish and Valley. Commenting on Farrell, Fr. Rybinski wrote, "Farrell is a town dropped down by Atlas when he was moving the clouds. A town of \$14,000,000 payroll annually! All nations under the sun are represented in Farrell!" And indeed they were! Saturday nights on Idaho Street were filled with activity — groups of people speaking different languages, visiting, shopping. The town was vigorous and stores stayed open late to cash industrial paychecks. You could buy anything from anywhere in the world right in Farrell — clothing, groceries, quality furniture, hardware and jewelry. Two movie houses, within a block of each other drew capacity crowds.

In the early morning hours of July 15, 1931, a crowd of a different sort gathered in Farrell, awakened by the sound of sirens. Coming forth from their homes in the dark, they could only stand in disbelief as they saw St. Adalbert's Church engulfed in flames. The bells began ringing as they came crashing down from the tower. When it was all over, the Rectory, School and Convent remained, but the Church was completely demolished — only a few artifacts, such as the present processional cross, the monstrance and some vestments were saved.

We had lost our church — but we would never lose our spirit and determination. The ringing of the bells as they fell into the fire was a sign that we would rise again from ashes. And so, undiscouraged, Father Rybinski and his Polish parishioners set about rebuilding the church. From the original cornerstone dated 1913, a new church arose and from the ashes, the original bells which had been christened in August of 1916 took their place once again in a new bell tower. These three bells ring today joyously in our church as testimony to the spirit of our Parish and forefathers. The new church, even larger and more beautiful than the first, was dedicated on April 3, 1932 by Most Rev. John Mark Gannon, Bishop of Erie.

In May of 1933, Rev. Casimir T. Nagorski was appointed the second pastor of St. Adalbert's Parish. For thirty-nine years, Fr. Nagorski would be the spiritual leader of our Parish. A quiet and deeply spiritual man, he was also an accomplished artist and musician. Under his leadership, the parish cemetery was enlarged and landscaped, the rectory was enlarged and there was a complete renovation of the church auditorium and school. Unfortunately, in 1959, due to the shortage of teaching nuns, the parochial school was forced to close its doors after forty-two years. Following its closing, it was used for religious instruction and eventually, along with the convent, it was torn down. Following his retirement, Fr. Nagorski moved to John XXIII Home, where he served as chaplain. He remained there until his death in 1987.

Since the retirement of Fr. Nagorski, four pastors have served St. Adalbert's Parish. Fr. William Maloney was pastor from 1972-1977. He recently celebrated his 40th anniversary as a priest and has since retired. He is remembered by many at St. Adalbert's for his quiet leadership, his spirituality and his gentle manner.

Following Fr. Maloney, Fr. Charles Murcko was appointed pastor and served here until 1984, when he assumed the Pastorate of St. Ann's Church in Farrell. Under his capable administration, our parish remained financially solvent even in the midst of difficult times.

From 1984 until 1986, Fr. Jan Olowin served as pastor, assisted by Brother Scott Kastel. They brought to our parish a spirit of enthusiasm and new life. Reviving many old traditions and bringing to life new ideas, they generated a sense of joy and confidence among us. Among their accomplishments were the completion of "Mary's Kitchen" and the construction of the Chapel at Holy Cross Cemetery. When Fr. Olowin assumed the Pastorate of St. Joseph's Parish in Oil City, in 1986, Fr. Dennis Hadberg was appointed pastor of St. Adalbert's.

The years have brought many changes to our Parish and community. Many of these changes have been good and exciting, others have been tragic and heartbreaking. But, through it all, one thing has not changed, and that is the spirit and determination of the people of St. Adalbert's Church and their great sense of loyalty. Many of our people have moved away, but they never forget their roots and their Church. Sunday morning at St. Adalbert's finds the parking lot filled with cars from Boardman, Girard, Masury, Brookfield, Vienna and Hubbard, in Ohio — from Hermitage, West Middlesex, Transfer, Mercer, Grove City, New Wilmington, Sharon, Sharpsville, Wheatland and Pulaski in Pennsylvania. Christmas and Easter find our church filled with people from all over the United States. Why are they here? Because this is Home and we can never forget our home and our Beloved Mother. Our continued loyalty to this Parish is our expression of gratitude for the sacrifices of our forefathers. May we continue to work together as a Parish Family as we look forward to the future and all the promise it holds.

To all of you, faithful and loyal parishioners and friends of St. Adalbert's, from all of us who have served this parish as your priests, heartfelt thanks for your many kindnesses, your loyalty and support throughout these seventy-five years.

Rev. Dennis C. Hadberg