



History of Transfiguration Church.

100 Years of Catholic Presence (1890-1965)
Transfiguration Church, Mount Pleasant, PA.
CAP at Orchard Lake.

It has been more than two centuries since British Gen. Edward Braddock launched an expedition which travelled through, and included an encampment, at the present location of Mount Pleasant.

Then inhabited by a mixture of Iroquois Indians and frontiersmen, the area was known as Helltown. That was in the year 1775. As a result of Braddock's trek, a permanent road was established in the region, bringing with it settlers. The new inhabitants, mostly of European descent, eventually developed a small community on the site of the former Helltown. So attractive was this hilly little community on the very edge of civilization, and so friendly were its citizens, that the fledgling town was renamed Mount Pleasant. In time, it became the first incorporated borough in the County of Westmoreland.

Located just 40 miles east of Pittsburgh, a rapidly growing steel and iron center during the 19th century, it was just a matter of time before Western Pennsylvania, and indeed Mount Pleasant, took advantage of the thick veins of coal which lie below the surface of the ground.

As the century was drawing to a close, coal mining and coke production were king in the Mount Pleasant area, attracting large numbers of Polish immigrants who were then arriving in this nation looking for a better life than was available in the poverty-stricken Eastern European Poland. Steady employment kept these Poles in the area, as they banded together to form a Polish community within the community of Mount Pleasant.

The common bond of all Poles, both in their traditional home and in America, has been the Catholic religion. At first, the immigrants attended St. John The Baptist R.C. Church in Scottdale, and later a newly-formed Polish parish in Everson, St. Joseph's Church.

Their dream, though, was to establish a Polish parish in Mount Pleasant. As the Polish population in Mount Pleasant grew to approximately 100 families, leaders raised money, and eventually petitioned the Pittsburgh Diocese for the local parish of their dreams.

In 1890, the dream became a reality, as Polish and Slavish residents bought a former Protestant church on Hitchman Street, Mount Pleasant, and established a new Roman Catholic parish. The temporary church would remain in use until 1899. Its name was Transfiguration and the Polish immigrants were finally able to truly call Mount Pleasant their home in every way. Eventually, the Slavic faction splintered, forming its own parish, Visitation.

Records show two babies were baptized by Father Henry Cichocki, April 17, 1890: Mary Henzel, daughter of Albert Henzel and Catherine Franda, born, March 25, 1890; and Anna Hazaj, daughter of George Hazaj and Anna Kuchar, born April 16, 1890.

The first marriages performed May 18, 1890 by Father Cichocki were Joseph Wegrzyn and Marie Grzebota, and Nicola Zubrik and Suzanne Warostek.

Property for the Transfiguration cemetery was purchased August 3, 1892, by Father Francis Pikulski, in the name of Rt. Rev. Bishop Phelan of Pittsburgh.

The first recorded death was that of Stanislaus Staszak, three months old, September 30, 1892.

The first masses at Transfiguration were celebrated by the Father Cichocki. The rest is all that makes up the glorious 100-year history of this parish — a history which will carry it into a second century of Polish Catholic presence in Mount Pleasant.

Still, Transfiguration would not receive its first pastor for nearly a year. In January 1891, the Rev. Julian Dutkiewicz arrived in Mount Pleasant. Father Dutkiewicz was already 71-years old when he made the move from Baltimore to Mount Pleasant, and died in March, 1892. He was buried in Scottdale, but his remains were later moved to Transfiguration Cemetery. In Father Dutkiewicz's time of illness, the Rev. Francis Pikulski took over spiritual duties at Transfiguration, eventually being named the parish's second pastor in 1893.

Father Pikulski was a pastor for advancement. In 1896, ground was purchased at the current site of Transfiguration Church and plans made for its construction. The cornerstone of the new church was blessed, by the Rev. Joseph Wielgus, pastor of Saint Stanislaus Church in Calumet during 1898.

At last, the church is completed!!! On Nov. 29, 1899 Benedictine Priest, the Rev. John Jager of Chicago dedicated the church. Attending the dedication were priests from numerous surrounding parishes. Two years into the 20th century, Transfiguration got its third pastor. The Rev. Alexander Siwiec began his service to the church on Oct. 26 and did much for advancement, including installation of a new pipe organ. So much was done during the pastorship of Father Siwiec, he was afforded two aids by the diocese. Assistant pastors were the Rev. Adamowski and the Rev. Pawelkiewicz.

Transfiguration School continued to expand. Through the turn of the century, the school had been staffed entirely by lay teachers. However, in 1903, Father Siwiec put out the call, and for the first time, Transfiguration was home to the Felician Sisters who would act as our children's teachers. After just a year, the Felician Sisters left Transfiguration. Enrollment was 230 children. There had been three nuns.

By 1906, a new and larger school was built for the ever expanding parish. The cost was \$15,000. Work was also begun on a new parsonage which was completed in 1907 for a cost of \$9,000.

In 1909, without warning, Father Siwiec was transferred to Saint Josephat's Church, Pittsburgh. He was succeeded by the Rev. Michael Kozłowski, Transfiguration's fourth pastor, who would minister to the needs of the parish for two decades. Along with a new pastor, the parish also heralded the return of the Felician Sisters. Assistants to Father Kozłowski during his tenure at Transfiguration were the first assistant, Rev. Ladislaus Śliwiński, Rev. Ladislaus Osiński, the Rev. Mieczyslaus Drelak and the Rev. Casimir Zieliński.

Transfiguration was a parish in mourning with the death of Father Kozłowski, who passed away on April 29, 1929, just two months shy of his 25th anniversary in the priesthood. He is buried in Transfiguration Cemetery, at the base of a large statue of the Crucified Savior. With the death of our priest, Father Zieliński served as interim pastor until May of 1930.

In that month, Father Zieliński was transferred to Imperial, Pa., bringing our fifth pastor, the Rev. Ladislaus Przybylski. During the depression, parish members were forced to move from the Mount Pleasant area in search of employment. The parish of Transfiguration diminished during this time, dropping from 600 to 400 families. The church was on solid financial ground, but there was some difficulty in keeping the school open, considering there was no tuition. The depression took its toll on Father Przybylski, whose health rapidly began to fail.

The Rev. Lloyd Zwoliński was sent by the Pittsburgh Diocese to assist Father Przybylski in 1936. His commitment to youth made him extremely popular.

Our parish again mourned the passing of a priest on March 9, 1937, as poor health took the life of Father Przybylski. He was buried in Homestead, the first parish he had served. For the next month, Father Zwoliński saw to our needs, but on April 22, the Rev. Anthony Pniak became our sixth pastor, after being transferred from Saint Cyprian's in Pittsburgh.

Transfiguration celebrated its Golden Jubilee in May 1940. Father Zwoliński remained as Father Pniak's assistant and the two helped keep the church strong and healthy. Accomplishments at Transfiguration during the 20-year tenure of Father Pniak were many. The church was painted, rubber tile installed in the sanctuary, floor tile installed in church aisles and the main bell tower was renovated. In addition, gas heat was installed in the rectory and a road constructed in the Cemetery. Five other priests served as assistant to Father Pniak. The Rev. Leon Darkowski came in 1943, staying until 1950; the Rev. Casimir Trzeciakowski served Transfiguration from 1950 to 1953; The Rev. Francis Leśniak stayed for one year, from 1953 to 1954; the Rev. Joseph Tamilowski served the parish from 1954 to 1956, and the Rev. Walter Bratus, from 1956 to 1957.

The Grotto to Our Lady, located on the lawn of our convent was donated by John G. Jendras, in memory of his wife Rose in 1956. The Grotto became the location for the traditional May crowning by the Sodality.

After so many years serving our parish, Father Pniak died suddenly on Jan. 26, 1957. He was buried Jan. 30 in Transfiguration Cemetery.

Father Bratus was interim pastor until the arrival of the Rev. Marion Rosenthal. He would be our seventh pastor, and like the departed Father Pniak, would serve the parish for more than two decades. He began work immediately, seeing a new heating system and school window project completed in his first year.

He didn't stop there. In 1958, tile was laid in three classrooms, the corridor was remodeled and Father Rosenthal was assigned a new assistant. The Rev. Theodore Wisniewski, came to Transfiguration after Father Bratus was transferred to Saint John's Church in Uniontown. On May 25, the parish helped Father Rosenthal celebrate his 40th anniversary in the priesthood with a party at Mount Pleasant Veteran's Club. Father Rosenthal was a worker from the very beginning, and in 1960, was recognized by the church hierarchy, being elevated to Domestic

Prelate, with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor. Another celebration was held, this time, with

600 in attendance.

With Monsignor Rosenthal at the helm, Transfiguration continued to forge ahead. There were countless advancements and achievements in both the school and the church. Included were the addition of a new classroom — only \$21,677 in those days — and creation of a cafeteria, kitchen and dining room in the school.

There was again cause for celebration in 1962, as a testimonial banquet was held for Father Ted in honor of his silver anniversary in the priesthood. Like Father Zwolinski, Father Ted was youth-minded, serving as director of the school, and for a time, as teacher. He was director of the Sodality and helped organize the Parent Teachers Guild, together with Monsignor Rosenthal, Father Bratus, and parishioners Frances Konieczny, Pearl Gaudiano and Betty Groblewski. Unfortunately, Father Ted was stricken by a sudden illness in August, 1964. In his absence, Bishop William Connare, of the Greensburg Diocese, assigned the Rev. Lawrence Hoppe to Transfiguration as Monsignor Rosenthal's assistant.

Monsignor Rosenthal and Father Hoppe led our parish into its 75th anniversary year in 1965, launching Transfiguration into the final quarter of its first century of Polish Catholic presence in Mount Pleasant.

Ground was broken March 7, 1963 for the proposed Father Geibel High School in Connellsville. With the Second Vatican Council, changes affecting the people of Transfiguration Parish were introduced.

We made big plans for May, 1966 — which celebrated the Polish Millennium with Monsignor Rosenthal as honorary chairman and Pauline Kurpiel as chairman. Many parishioners lent a helping hand to make this celebration of the faith a huge success. Many floats were made for the parade with its theme of the Catholic Faith in Poland.

Father Lawrence Hoppe left in June to become principal of Greensburg Central Catholic High School. As Father Lawrence left our parish, the Rev. Henry J. Brzuska arrived, being named assistant pastor to Msgr. Rosenthal. Sept. 25, we welcomed back Father Ted.

We were both happy and sad in 1968, as first, we helped Msgr. Rosenthal celebrate 50 years in the priesthood on May 29, then wished him farewell less than a month later, as he retired to Florida on June 25.

As always, Transfiguration endures and marches ahead. With open arms, we welcomed our eighth pastor, Father Walter Iwaniski on June 23. Later that year, a new office area was in use at the Rectory. In June 1969, our parish congratulated a homegrown product of Transfiguration Church, as Msgr. Ferdinand Sojka celebrated 25 years in the priesthood. Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Adam Zipnock, the floor of the sanctuary was refinished in July of 1969.

We headed into the 1970s with good deeds and continuing achievements. A Cub Scout Pack was organized at Transfiguration in November and our choir donated a Nativity Scene to Westmoreland Manor, Greensburg on Dec. 13. On May 28, 1972, Father Henry leaves our parish after six years. We are happy to see him receive his own parish, St. Mary's Church in Parker, and gave him a testimonial dinner at the Kosciuszko Club. Our new assistant, Father Stanley Jasioneck comes from Holy Rosary Church, Republic.

It is a decade for celebration, as another native son, Father Stanley Kilar, celebrates a golden anniversary in the priesthood on May 13, 1973.

Father Stanley Jasioneck's stay is a short one, as he moves to St. Leonard's Church, Monessen on May 25, 1975. A farewell was held in his honor. Father Leonard Bealko replaced Father Stanley as assistant pastor. 1975 was also a big year for our basketball team which was the undefeated champion of the School Basketball League.

At the request of Mount Pleasant Borough officials, Transfiguration was host to the Religious Observance of our nation's Bicentennial on July 4. Services were held here with clergy of all denominations participating.

With an all-volunteer effort, we began installing a new roof on the convent on Aug. 6. A farewell party for Father Leonard was held at the Kosciuszko Club on May 27, 1979. He was transferred to Saint Mary's in New Kensington. He is replaced by the Rev. Dennis Bogusz. A new organ was installed May 17 at a cost of \$7,600.

At the death of our extremely popular former pastor, Msgr. Marion Rosenthal, the parish is willed \$38,400. Monsignor passed away in Florida June 16, 1979, and brought here for burial at our Transfiguration cemetery June 19, 1979.

We are honored the Senior Choir is chosen to sing the Holy Mass and Vespers at the Pilgrimage Mass at St. Hyacinth Church, Monessen, Aug. 17, 1980.

Improvements continue on the church. In 1981 we renovated our three church towers and 15 windows at a cost of \$18,000. We welcomed the Traveling Icon of the Virgin Mary of Czestochowa at Transfiguration from Oct. 16-18. New electric votive candle stands were installed at a cost of \$3,600, donated by the Rosary Society. In March, we repaired and reset our pews.

Father Francis Lesniowski arrived on July 1, 1983 as the Administrator.

After 80 years of continuous service to Transfiguration School, the Felician sisters announced their withdrawal on Oct. 15, 1983.

Transfiguration parish saw 1984 as a year of change. Father Walter Iwaniski celebrated his 75th birthday Aug. 23, then retired to St. Joseph's Hall. There were new faces at Transfiguration, including the Principal, Sister Estelle as principal of Transfiguration and Visitation Schools, Felician Sisters Felicitia, Eulalia and Antonine, remained in the parish as pastoral ministers and instructors of religion. Father Frank was named pastor on August 23. With Father Frank as our new leader, many things have been happening. On March 11, our Parish Council is increased from nine members to 16.

Transfiguration celebrates Msgr. Mitchel Kaczmarek's 50 years in the priesthood on April 28, 1985. The big news, though, came in 1986. Sister Jon Francis, S.C., becomes principal of Transfiguration and St. Pius X Schools. Transfiguration School was closed along with the closing of Visitation and St. Pius X Schools. A new school for the three parishes of Mount Pleasant was opened and named "Holy Trinity Catholic", using Transfiguration School and St. Pius X School buildings under Principal Sister Jon Francis, supported by the three parishes in Mount Pleasant, Transfiguration, St. Pius X and Visitation with Father Frank as chairman of the Board of Pastors.

There was even more big news, Father Frank met with Rudolph Rohn to discuss final plans for a \$300,000 renovation. Our Masses were moved from church to the school hall on Feb. 16, and would remain there until renovations were completed. This renovation included rewiring, and installation of new lights, replastering, repainting, installation of new speaking system, carpeting, refinishing

the pews and adding new kneelers. The old confessionals were removed, added were a Chapel of Reconciliation, a side entrance, a handicap ramp, front patio and steps, restrooms, sacristies, new doors and Shrine areas including the Altar of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

It was a big day, almost as big as the day the church was first completed, so many years ago, the remodeled Transfiguration Church is re-dedicated on May 20. Bishop William G. Connare was principal celebrant and a special con-celebrated Mass at 5 p.m. and the parish held a dinner-dance at the Kosciuszko Club that night. To top off the year, new Christmas trees and lights were installed.

We lost three friends in 1987. On April 5, Father Stanley Kilar, former parishioner and priest died. He was followed by Felician Sister Palcentia Donajcan, in June, and then Father Walter E. Iwaniski, July 28. There was good news in 1987, as the parish participated in the 1st annual Mount Pleasant Glass Festival, making more than \$6,000 on the event. The parish festival was also a success, bringing in more than \$18,000. Father Stanley Kilar left a legacy to the church in the form of a \$5,000 gift. We were all excited as we heralded Pope John Paul II's visit to the United States.

Our parish enrollment dropped to 501 families in 1988. Renovations were completed on the church, the cost was \$368,228.93. A 1979 Buick Sedan was donated to our parish in memory of Gerald Gaudiano, by his wife, Pearl. Felician Sister Felicita celebrated 60 years of religious life in October, then passed away suddenly Nov. 11. The parish made two trips by bus to Coraopolis for the wake and funeral. Christopher Klocek Day was proclaimed by the Parish Council and then celebrated on November 6. He returned after serving two years as a volunteer in the Peace Corps.

Father Frank's 25th anniversary in the priesthood was celebrated May 25. Transfiguration was ministering to 501 families and 1,789 souls.

The renovation of the church towers began August 1989 with the rebuilding of the two side towers and recovering of all three steeples with copper, and the installation of a lightning protection system at a cost of \$81,400.

It is 1988, and we are starting plans to have a celebration of 100 years of Polish Catholic presence in Mount Pleasant. Since the 100th anniversary day falls on April 18, 1990, we will celebrate this event on April 20, 1990, with Bishop Anthony G. Bosco as principal celebrant.

Activities began with the opening of 40 hours devotion and will continue with plans made for each month of the year, and end with participation in the Glass Festival in 1990.

This history of our church is the background for the beginning of our second 100 years of Polish Catholic presence in Mount Pleasant for the people of Transfiguration Parish.