



### **A Brief History of Our Mother of Consolation Church.**

Golden Jubilee 1897-1947 Mother of Consolation Church, Mt. Carmel, PA, p. 30-33. CAP at Orchard Lake.

Shortly after the Civil War, with the outpour of those thousands, who craving to shape destinies of their own, sought the opportunities of America, a large representation of Poles settled in the hills of Pennsylvania, to find employment in the beckoning coal and mineral mines of the state. For this very same reason, in about 1870 the first handful of Polish immigrants began to locate in the little mining town of Mount Carmel, Pa., at a time when the village, though budding with a Catholic population was devoid of Church and priest. The deeply religious Poles rather than do without the Divine Sacrifice would traverse the then pathless woods and scramble over rocky hillsides to Ashland where, at the one Catholic Church, they were able to satisfy their spiritual needs.

Until the town grew to boast of one Catholic Church, the Church of Our Lady, the Polish people attended either of the two churches in the vicinity which supplemented their religious nature. But as it is with the Poles—the burning desire for a Congregation of their own, with sermons in their native tongue, and the surpassingly beautiful hymns learned in early childhood and handed down through generations, culminated in the erection of the first Polish parish, the St. Joseph Church, at the corner of Hickory and Sixth Streets.

When new throngs of immigrants began to flock to Pennsylvania's wealth of mines, Mount Carmel, as other mining places, increased in its Polish population. Soon all the members of the one Polish parish could not, for divine worship and services, be accommodated within the small wooden building, and in 1896 about 150 of these families decided to purchase a plot of land thereon to build a new church.

At extraordinary sacrifices—for an immigrant miner is blessed in his poverty—the sum of \$6,500 was obtained and subscribed for the purchase of the two lots and double frame dwelling located at the corner of Avenue and Poplar Street. An assessment of \$20 was levied on each member and with this money a frame church building, two stories high and measuring 60x36 feet was constructed. Perhaps it was the innate love of the Pole for his heavenly Mother that prompted him to dedicate "this simple but hard-earned structure to Her. In his grief at being torn away from the country he loved so well and yet choose to forsake for many a political reason and exile himself into an alien land, he may have turned to Mary for comfort. In either instance, or any other, the Church was named "Our Mother of Consolation," a tribute of devoted children to the Mother of God. Here on the main floor were held the Church services while on the second the school was conducted with the Felician Sisters in charge.

Organizer and first priest to minister to the spiritual welfare of the newly created church for four trying years was the Rev. Benedict Tomiak who coped with the pioneer trials of the Congregation from 1896 to 1900. Upon his resignation, he was succeeded by the Rev. John Graca who re-mained at his Mount Carmel post for a few short months. The Rev. Mieczyslaw Kopytkiewicz, the Rev. Mark Januszkiewicz, and the Rev. Marion Orzechowski, each in succession, labored for a short time among the people.

In 1903 when the Holy Ghost Fathers undertook this herculean assignment, the Rev. Ladislaus Alachniewicz was the first member of the Congregation to assume pastoral duties at M. O. C. Within a few years the membership of the parish leaped to 300 families and more than 200 others. Despite the fact that the parish was still in debt and the miner's wages more meager than before, the good people began to realize how the need of larger and more substantial structures for both church and school was pressing down upon them. All in one accord with the pastor, the Rev. Alachniewicz, planned the erection of a new church. Some funds were quickly raised, so that on August 15, 1905, the Mother of Consolation Parish was happy to invite the Rt. Rev. Koch of Shamokin to lay the cornerstone of the new building. This spirit of good will and comradeship was so evident among the Poles that even the other denominations of the town began to take notice and wonder.

The construction, once begun, advanced speedily so that on May 30, 1906, the new church was ready for its dedication and blessing. The Most Rev. John W. Shanahan, at that time Bishop of Harrisburg, conducted the ceremonies and consecrated the magnificent edifice, the token of immigrant gratitude and love, to the worship of God.

For two more years, Father Alachniewicz toiled patiently with his flock, but in 1908 he was recalled by his Superiors to the distant mission fields of Africa. His position was immediately filled by the Rev. Michael Retka, C. S. Sp., who labored in the parish for seven years. Tireless and energetic, Father Retka at once made known his aim: to discharge as much as possible of the parish debt. Indeed, during his Pastorship \$20,- 000 of the original \$80,000 had been paid. It was also through his efforts, for the scholarly pastor lost no time in advancing primary education, that the parochial school had so elevated its standards, that no examinations were required by the public high schools of those who had successfully completed their eighth year at Mother of Consolation School.

In 1915 Father Retka was assigned to fill a professorship at the Duquesne University in Pittsburgh and his successor, the Rev. Ceasar Tomaszewski, began his duties as pastor of Mother of Consolation Parish on July 1, 1915.

Here was the personification of ingenuity! Betrayed by an inborn love for classical beauty, Father Tomaszewski during his first year at M. O. C. tactfully suggested plans to beautify the church interior which, since its construction in 1906 had not as yet been adorned in any way. In eager response to this petition, the people offered \$4,000. with which the work commenced. The eminent Polish artist, Mr. Henry Niemczynski, lost no time in beginning his painting. Before four months of time had sped by, the entire church had been wonderfully transformed into a truly glorious and grand House of God.

Other improvements, along with the addition of the side altars and shrines, as well as the installation of electricity, followed.

When the enrollment of children in the parish school grew steadfastly so that the number mounted towards a thousand students, no words of exhortation were needed to raise funds for a new building.

Begun in 1924 the school was completed a year later at the cost of \$250,000. A modern structure with every possible convenience, it is comprised of 16 spacious classrooms, a large auditorium with a well-built stage and accessories, cinema booth, a kitchen and cafeteria.

The World War II is now a thing of the past, yet the good preferred through the silent work of Father Skibinski to the 676 young parish men and women in the service of their country, still rebounds with warm gratitude.

For four consecutive years, that is from January 1, 1942 to January 1, 1946 the 7:00 o'clock Mass was celebrated each Sunday by the pastor for the welfare and safe return of each serviceman and women. The Church societies, especially the Rosary Society, the N.C.C.W., and the Holy Name Society were truly beneficent in their plans for the returning soldier. A regular correspondence maintained largely and personally by the pastor became a medium of exchange of home news. "Regular morale boosters"— they were frequently called by the visiting service men who attended the free dances and partook of the free lunches that M. O. C. modestly tried to substitute for Mount Carmel's non-existent U.S.O. The Saturday night dance guest book records the names of over 7,386 of these members of the armed forces who enjoyed themselves with the youth of the parish during the years of the war.

Father Skibinski, in his great enthusiasm to set the soldier spiritually on his feet, would encourage each, before he left for his particular destination, to come to the rectory for a blessing or word of advice, or medal, or prayer book, or rosary, given gladly and always.

Marriages of service men and baptisms of their children were performed gratis—all indications how the priests of the parish were ready to serve anyone who served the country.

Today, the youngsters of the parish are able to enjoy a Hot Lunch served daily in the school cafeteria. Approximately 200 children are taking advantage of the School Lunch Program offered so magnificently by the pastor in collaboration with the government.

If, as Charles Lamb puts it: "The greatest pleasure in life is to do a good deed in secret and have it discovered by accident," no one has better possibilities of a happy life than Father Skibinski who patterns his life on the great commandment: "Whatsoever you do unto the least . . ."

It is not so very easy to sum up the accomplishments of a priest in a lifetime of labor with men's souls. He piles up no shining possessions, as does a manufacturer or a banker. He leaves no splendid treaties, made or broken, like a politician. Yet within these 50 years the priests who have labored so hard in this part of the Master's Vineyard have left more material signs of their achievements than most men do.

There are, for example, four well-kept and cared for parish buildings of solid stone and brick in the Mother of Consolation Parish. They will outlast generations and remind the faithful of the less tangible things that can be done. But even these are less important than the little miracles they have wrought, each in his homely way, upon the minds of the parishioners, who accepted them and lived accordingly.

There remains for us who are here to reap the fruits of fifty years of labor and graces to place ourselves in the presence of the good Lord and with utmost humility acknowledge the blessings and kindnesses of the Giver of all good things. Our thanks may not be easily apprehended by others, but let our lips and hearts join each moment, each day in an everlasting hymn of humble gratitude!

Pastors:

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| Rev. Benedict Tomiak, Founder of the Parish | 1896—1900 |
| Rev. John Graca                             | 1900—1900 |
| Rev. Miechyslaus Kopytkiewicz               | 1901—1901 |
| Rev. Mark Januszkiewicz                     | 1901—1902 |
| Rev. Maryan J. Orzechowski                  | 1902—1903 |
| Rt. Rev. Msgr. A. Mauwese, V. F             | 1902—1903 |
| Rev. Ladislaus Alachniewicz, C. S. Sp       | 1903—1908 |
| Rev. Michael Retka, C. S. Sp                | 1908—1915 |
| Rev. Ceasar Tomaszewski, C. S. Sp           | 1915—1926 |
| Rev. Theodore Maniecki, C. S. Sp            | 1926—1928 |
| Rev. Michael Sonnefeld, C. S. Sp            | 1928—1935 |
| Rev. Joseph A. Pobleschek, C. S. Sp         | 1935—1941 |
| Rev. Joseph Skibiński, C. S. Sp             | 1941—,    |