



## **A Brief History of the Sacred Heart Parish**

Dedication of the New Sacred Heart School,  
South Amboy, NJ. CAP at Orchard Lake.

The founders, organizers and members of the first Sacred Heart Parish in South Amboy, New Jersey were Poles who emigrated from Western Poland, around the regions of Wilno and Krakow, the principality of Vienna Congress. Why did the Poles come here from distant Europe?

We may answer this question in a few sentences:

In the year 1628 we already find Polish Immigration to America. These first immigrants settled in various parts of the country and thus never formed a distinct settlement. However after the Insurrections of 1831 and 1863, Polish immigration, headed notably by Kosciuszko and Pulaski steadily increased. In the eighteenth century Poland began to lose the independence she cherished since the year 966. Driven by their insatiable imperialistic tendencies, Russia, Prussia and Austria divided Poland among themselves. Russia took the East, Prussia the West and North while Austria dominated the South. Although the Polish nation lost her governmental independence, she retained the fullness of her spiritual independence which took the form of her rich and deeply rooted culture, fostered through the centuries by the common efforts of all her people. The pivotal point of Polish culture was the reception of Baptism by Prince Mieszko in 966 and the inclusion of the nation subjected to him among the great Christian families of Western Europe. Even at the time she lost her independence in the eighteenth century, Poland possessed a splendid literature. The national folklore helped form the souls of the Poles with beautiful national songs, some of which were composed by the country's own musical genius, Frederic Chopin. Colorfulness, richness and diversity in the form of national dress spoke to the eyes and imagination of the people. The Poles also expressed their lively feelings choreographically by the incomparable and original dances of their particular locale. Learning, architecture and Polish music eventually reached the high level of creativeness found in the countries of Western Europe. Finally the Roman Catholic religion, with its liturgy, formed the imagination of the Poles and its Christian morality guided their progress according to ethical principles. All these cultural elements permeated the lives of the Poles and produced in their consciousness a feeling of belonging to a distinct social group.

The Poles in Western Poland were under the domination of Prussia and persecuted by the German Kulturkampf. The Poles who settled in South Amboy, N. J. were from Western Poland. They came here to escape their oppressors and to revive the social, cultural and religious atmosphere they had once known. Their efforts, above all, tended to the establishing of a Catholic parish and school for the education of their youth.

In 1877 the Prymka and Gomolka families settled in South Amboy. In 1892 the number of Polish families increased to 32. In 1895 the small Polish colony was composed of nearly 63 families and the necessity of tying a closer social bond among themselves began to be realized. St. Mary's Church in South Amboy at this time was unable to adequately satisfy the spiritual needs of the Poles, for the American born priests were not familiar with the Polish tongue. As a result the Poles would often travel to St. Stanislaus Church, East 7th St., New York. Because of this tremendous inconvenience, Joseph Prymka, Nebus, Biesiada and Gorczyca presented to Bishop McFaul of Trenton a petition signed by the Polish residents of South Amboy requesting their own church. The Bishop received their request favorably and in 1895 assigned Rev. M. F. Orzechowski as the first pastor of the newly founded parish which was placed under the protection of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. For six months the newly appointed pastor celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in a concert hall located on the corner of Second Street and Broadway, presently occupied by the Eisner Manufacturing Company. Two months later the construction of a parish church and school began. In the same year Bishop McFaul officiated at the blessing of the edifice. The number of parishioners swiftly increased.

After four years of pastoral work Fr. Orzechowski returned to Poland because of failing health where he soon passed on to his eternal reward. He was succeeded by Rev. Julian Zielinski. The new pastor constructed living quarters for the priests on Cedar Street. In November, 1902, Fr. Zielinski was appointed Pastor of St. Stephen's church in Perth Amboy. He was immediately succeeded at South Amboy by Rev. Francis Czarnecki. Still the parish grew. It soon became evident that the church was too small and the school could no longer accommodate all of the students. These new needs were met zealously by Fr. Czarnecki and in 1907 he built the present church in the form of the Old Christian Roman Basilica. At this time Father Czarnecki was also plagued by ill health and- he requested a leave of absence from the Ordinary. From 1909 the administration of the parish and the completion of the interior of the church fell to Fr. Joseph Urban. When Fr. Urban was named pastor of St. Stephen's in Perth Amboy in 1910, the vacancy in Sacred Heart parish was filled by Fr. Arthur Strenski. He remained here until 1925. Under his energetic guidance the parish developed still more swiftly. He liquidated the \$37,000 debt that was burdening the parish at this time. He constructed the present rectory located on Washington Street across from the Church for a sum of \$25,000. The convent for the Felician Sisters located on Walnut Street is also a product of his initiative, the cost of which was \$35,000. At this time Fr. Strenski also purchased part of the land of the present day cemetery, where the remains of the faithful departed remind the living of the spiritual solidarity in this life and the bond of the Communion of Saints in the next. In 1921 Fr. Strenski encouraged the parishioners to mutually cooperate in digging out a hill that reached the roof-top of the church where the new school is now located. By leveling off this hill, land was acquired for the convent and a suitable place for the recreational purposes foreseen in a scholastic program.

In 1925 as a result of an unfortunate automobile accident in which Fr. Julian Zielinski lost his life, Father Strenski was transferred to the pastorate of St. Hedwig's Church in Trenton, NJ. He was succeeded at South Amboy by Fr. Peter Wiczorek. Fr. Wiczorek remained here for 18 months. He renewed and enlarged the old school and built an impressive parish house and auditorium for the sum of \$95,000. During his administration the sloping areas around the church were cemented and sidewalks laid around the house of worship. Indeed a great amount of work and initiative for such a short period of administration! The position of pastor in 1926 was then embraced by the Rev. Zenon Lesniowski who after eight years of pastoral work was succeeded on May 3, 1935 by

the present pastor, the Rev. Walter Urbanik.

The long period of pastoral work of Father Urbanik is marked with a whole series of material improvements within the parish as well as unmatched growth of the deep and inspiring religious life of the parishioners.

We note but a few of the more important facts:

The new pastor finding all of the parochial buildings in dire need of immediate repairs and a \$104,000 debt, energetically set out to meet the task. In 1935 the newly appointed pastor seeing the roof on the parish hall completely ruined by neglected conservation had it removed and replaced with a new one at a cost of \$4,000.

1936 — New steps constructed of granite were placed at the main entrance of the Church. This was done to remove the hazardous condition which existed at this time. The cost of this improvement was \$8,000. Valuing the roles of sports as a formative element in the physical development of the people and likewise caring for a suitable recreation for the parishioners which accomplished together creates a spiritual community within society, a bowling alley with four lanes was built in the lower parish hall. The cost of this investment to the parish was \$20,000.

1937 — The interior of the church was redecorated with expensive polychrome at a cost of \$35,000.

1938 — The interior of the school was repainted and the old roof replaced with a new one at a cost of \$7,000.

1942 — New side altars of marble were installed in the church and decorated with new candelabras and bronze crosses.

1943 — For the first time in the history of the parochial school a kindergarten was opened. The Parish hall was renewed and redecorated.

1944 — The \$104,000 debt inherited from the previous administration was successfully liquidated by the Rev. Walter Urbanik. This happy moment was highlighted by the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the parish church by Fr. Walter Urbanik on December 9, 1944 in the presence of His Excellency the Most Reverend Bishop William Griffin.

1945 — The parish celebrated its golden jubilee. At a cost of \$1,205.00 a new altar was placed in the convent chapel. For a sum of \$5,325.00 the church steeples were reinforced. This same year the rectory was repainted at a cost of \$2,705.00 The Main Street side of the rectory was enclosed with a new iron fence. The cost of materials and installation was \$1,846.00

1946 — Cement steps leading to the school and the steps leading to the side entrance of the church were constructed. The Church was also encircled with cement sidewalks. Cost of the project was \$2,000. At this time the Main Street side of the rectory was enlarged for the sum of \$5,439.00. For the convenience of worshippers the kneelers of the church were cushioned with foam rubber at a cost of \$1,560.00. The parish cemetery was expanded with the acquisition of 7 acres of land for the sum of \$12,891.83.

1947 — This year the Rosary Society of the parish was instrumental in having a Crucifixion group executed in stone placed in the cemetery at a cost of \$9,394.00. A new roof was placed on the convent of the sisters at a cost of \$8,148.50. The land adjoining St. Mary's cemetery was acquired for the sum of \$5,184.85. The leveling of this land as well as making it adaptable for sports amounted

to the sum of \$15,000. At a cost of \$1 2,000 a central heating system was installed in the church, rec-tory, sisters convent and parish hall.

1948 — The cemetery was enclosed with an iron fence. Cement curbing was laid throughout the cemetery. The cost of the projects was \$22,000. With the death of Mr. Charles Safran the Safran estate was purchased for the sum of \$35,527.22.

1949 — In the cemetery, trees were planted along the fences. The newly acquired land at the cemetery was leveled and landscaped. The main streets of the cemetery were macadamized. The cost of labor and materials for this undertaking was \$15,544.27. The school playground was also blacktopped at a cost of \$2,850.00.

1950 —The great explosion in 1950 of explosive materials or lighters moored in the Raritan Bay caused immense damage to all parish buildings. The damage to the church and other parochial buildings was \$150,000. The work of repairing the damaged buildings began at once. The church, school, rectory, and convent were exteriorly and interiorly renovated. Materials and labor cost \$85,000. Since only 6 stained glass windows es-caped damage, new windows were replaced at a cost of \$26,000. A new organ was purchased for \$20,000. A new communion rail fitting for the Eucharistic Banquet made of marble, imported from Italy, was installed for the sum of \$7,000. Oak closets for the liturgical vestments were placed in the sacristy for the sum of \$3,007.00. Finally, all the walls of the church were covered with Scagiola, an imitation marble at a cost of \$5,000.

1951 — The floor of the church was covered with rubber tile at a cost of \$8,000.

1953 — The Gleason Estate located on the corner of Walnut Street and Washington Avenue was purchased for \$9,500.00. Immediately the newly purchased building was converted over to meet the growing needs of the school at a cost of \$12,000. The convent of the Venerable Sisters was remodeled at a cost of \$22,000.

1955 —The land located behind the parish home was leveled and adapted for parking facilities. This land was macadamized. Electrical lights were installed and a two car garage was built. The aggregate cost of this project was \$32,000.

1956 —The last portion of the \$1 04,000 assessment imposed upon the Sacred Heart Parish by the Bishop of Trenton for the construction of Central High Schools in various parts of the diocese, wherein the youth of the Trenton Diocese might be grounded in Christian and religious principles, was paid off. General repairs were made to the roof of the church; rain spouts were replaced, cornices around the church were covered with copper, new roofing was put over the sacristy and side naves of the church, and the damaged places on the main nave were replaced with new roof tile. The cost of these general repairs were \$24,000.

1957 — The residence of Mrs. Julia Nebus bordering the new school on the western side was purchased for \$15,000. The residence of Mrs. Sophie Reszkowski bordering the sister's convent on the western side also was bought for the sum of \$1 3,000.

The new school which we today dedicate was built on the site of the very hill that was leveled in 1921. The school being furnished and equipped with all modern and technical developments now meets the needs of modern pedagogy. This financial effort cost the parish \$575,000.

The Sacred Heart Parochial School was established with the beginning of the Parish. Mr. Stanislaw Kwilinski, the organist and parish choir director was the first teacher. In 1902 the sisters from the

Congregation of Saint Felix of Santalicio, popularly known as the Felician Sisters, arrived at the parish from Buffalo, New York to take over the post of teaching and directing the school. The first group of Sisters to arrive were three in number. Two of the Sisters taught in school. Each of the Sisters conducted her own class. The enrollment for this year totaled 102 pupils. In the following, year the Motherhouse at Buffalo realized that it was necessary to send four teachers. The first superior of the school was Sister Mary Victoria. In the year 1911 the parochial school was composed of five grades. With each succeeding year the number of pupils grew. In 1915 the first commencement exercises were held.

At this time the province of the Felician Sisters at Buffalo, New York was divided into two autonomous provinces. The new province chose Lodi, New Jersey as its Motherhouse. From this point the Sacred Heart Parish received its teachers from the newly founded province at Lodi. The sacrifice of the Sisters was extraordinary. It is almost impossible to express in words how much the parochial school owes both spiritually and materially to the selflessness and complete sacrifice of the Felician Sisters.

At the present time there are 13 religious Sisters and 3 lay teachers teaching in the school.

From 1935 until 1957 the Sacred Heart Parish furnished its sacristy with sacred vessels and liturgical vestments truly worthy of the performance of the Sacred Mysteries. The various copes, chasubles, dalmatics, and tunics are all made of precious brocades, being decorated with hand-made embroideries executed by the most talented artists. Albs, surplices and altar cloths are all of the finest and costliest linens and laces. Considering the richness, the artistic taste in execution, the various forms and colors, and the number of sets with which our sacristy is provided, it can be ranked with the Cathedral Sacristies of our nation. During the pastorship of the Rev. Walter Urbanik the parish paid \$35,000 for providing the sacristy with liturgical vestments.

The religious life of the Sacred Heart Parish, South Amboy, New Jersey, strikes an impartial observer by the frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist, the concern for the growth of the Divine Life in the soul, the large participation in the nocturnal adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament on the First Fridays of each month, the observance of ethical principles both in the social and family life, the concentration of the family life around the reality of God, the faithful attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holydays of Obligation, and finally by the amazing generosity of the faithful toward religious and charitable causes. One can certainly recognize these parishioners by the exterior order of their homes, by the cleanliness of dress, and by the radiation of their interior bounty. Possessing all these qualities, truly it may be said, that the Sacred Heart Parish of South Amboy, New Jersey excels all other parishes in the Trenton Diocese.

Praise to the ancestors who transmitted so many noble feelings and a deep human and religious culture to their posterity!

Praise to the Felician Sisters unequalled Christians and educators of our youth!

Praise to the Pastors who did not fail to overlook anything so that the Parish might reach such a level of development which today is its prestige and the foundation for justified pride!