In 1978, Father Adam J. Bydlon was our Pastor and Father Robert J. Grudowski was the Assistant Pastor. Two hard working priests that provided support, guidance, and encouragement to all organizations and parishioners. They helped to make things happen. At the Oplatek supper, movies of the 75th Jubilee Celebration Mass and Banquet were shown. Senator Bell presented a Resolution passed by the State Senate, honoring St. Hedwig’s on the occasion of its 75th Anniversary. Polish language classes were started by Bert Piscotty. Scout leaders and scouts of Troop 86 were congratulated on their 25th Anniversary. The scouting program was very active, successful, and productive. Total of 15 boys reached the rank of Eagle Scout. The program was led by dedicated men and women like Joe Glowacki, Bill Sheeky, Stan Kokoszka, Stanley Kogut, Jake Mieka, Joseph Igielski, Joe Winiarski, Sam Durbano, Ron Sweigert, Ted Sikora, Emil & Cecilia Wolanin, Michael & Natalie Wiciak, Frances Kwapisz, Verna Yurkonis and others. 1978 was a busy year. Two hundred (200) men attended an annual Holy Name Communion Breakfast. Weekly bingo and 1500 club provided financial support. Our Easter offering totaled $12,536.00. Father Reynold Czarnota's 25th Anniversary Mass was celebrated at St. Hedwig’s. Father was a chaplain in the U. S. Air Force. Father Bernard Witkowski had been named Pastor of St. Ladislaus Church, Philadelphia on June 7, 1978. Our annual parish bazaar netted $8,663.00. Father Bydlon led a trip to Hawaii, accompanied by 52 parishioners. Father Sebastian Babiarz, Assistant Pastor of St. Hedwig’s from 1963 -1966 died August 10, 1978. Pope John Paul II was elected as our new Pope. The annual Pulaski Day Parade was held in downtown Chester, PA on October 15,1978. Parish sponsors a Girl Scout Program. Lady of Fatima paid $1,100.00 for installation of new linoleum in both church sacristies. PNA Group 650 celebrated its 75th Anniversary with Mass and Banquet at the hall. Christmas offering totaled $14,940.00. CYO started to provide our parish with an effective and active program for the youth. This program was led by dedicated men and women like Sam & Wanda Durbano, Jerry & Mickey Schad, Anthony Kwiatkowski, Brian Litwa, Robert & Mary Weigand, Ziggy & Jane Sendek, Ann Maitland, Susan Kozlowski, Barbara Ellis, John & Sophie Adamski, Pat Clements and others.

During 1979, parish activities continued. The Polish Eucharistic Choir sponsored a Banquet honoring St. Hedwig’s Choir with Mass followed by a Banquet and Dance in the parish hall. The Home & School Association held its annual fashion show at the Brandywine Club. The school
children held a successful candy sale. They sold 12,000 bars and the sale netted $4,000.00. Father A. Bydlon was transferred to St. John Cantius Parish, Bridesburg, Philadelphia, PA. He was replaced by Father Reynold Czarnota, a priest son of the parish, effective June 6, 1979. Farewell and reception were celebrated with Mass and socials at the hall. Within one month of Father Ray's arrival, you could see a difference in the administration of parish business. He started publishing attendance numbers at Sunday masses and total contributions with comparison to like Sundays for the previous year. A listing of needed repairs to the parish buildings also published. He wanted the parishioners to be aware of the financial requirements for the operation and maintenance of all the buildings, pastoral and school costs. The Chapel in the old school building was opened on November 5, 1979, for daily masses with seating for about 50 people. The chapel eliminated heating the church and use of lights for daily mass. The harvest dance was held in October with Rich Korenkiewicz acting as chairman. Christmas 1979 collection totaled $15,262.00.

In 1980, work was started to repair, restore, and refurbish our stained glass windows and to install lexan protective coverings for an estimated cost of $40,000.00. Also, to install a new heating system in the new school and auditorium at an estimated cost of $40,000.00. Financial drives were started to help pay for these large expenses. Parishioners were requested to donate specifically toward these two major repairs. The Sunday bulletins published all contributions of $30.00 or more. A fund drive was started called the "Million Dollar Adventure". Tickets cost $2.00 for 24 weeks. To cool the church in the summer, fans were installed as well as exhaust fans in the towers and the basement Adam Slezak chaired the annual Catholic Charities appeal. The St Hedwig's men attended the annual retreat to Malvern. The Holy Name breakfast was held at the parish hall. Father John Jagodzinski was the featured speaker. Our 40 hours closing was attended by 50 priests, who were served a delicious dinner by our senior citizens. Due to a shortage of priests, the priests from St. Hedwig's and Resurrection parishes were assigned chaplaincy duties at Sacred Heart Hospital. The Holy Name Society sponsored a Gala New Year's Eve Party.

1981 to 1990 -During this decade, the religious and social activities flourished and the different organizations supplied support with their participation in the communion breakfasts, dances, bazaars, picnics, trips, parties, fashion shows, school activities, and holiday events. It was also a period where the immigration from Poland was slowing down. The grammar school student body was decreasing and the younger people were moving to the suburbs. The heritage, spirit, and the faith of the parishioners did not diminish and was always displayed in their attendance at mass and their financial support through various funding drives that were instituted to supplement the income of the parish.

In 1981, Robert Klecko was selected by the Kosciuszko Foundation for enrollment in a special six-week session for the study of Polish culture and language at the University of Krakow. Bob left on July 11, 1981. The year was featured by name band dances, Holy Name picnic at Archmere, Home & School fashion show, casino trips, CYO and Scout activities, Fatima communion breakfast and parish bazaar.
1982 - In addition to our annual activities, a bus trip to Schubert Theatre in Philadelphia was arranged to see "our own" Arlene Kulis in the show" ANNIE". Father Robert Grudowski was appointed as Pastor of St Josaphat's Church, Manayunk, PA on 2/17/82. Father John Sitko became the Assistant Pastor of St. Hedwig's on 2/17/82. Father Paul Lambarski, Pastor of St. Josaphat's died 2/17/82.


1984 to 1989 - In September 1985, the Holy Name Society was reorganized and started monthly meetings and other church activities, under the guidance of Paul Pinkoski as President and Albin Chominski as Secretary-Treasurer. In July 1985, Sister Bernadette Glodek, a parish daughter, was appointed as Assistant Superintendent of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. David Koratkiewicz graduated from medical school with honors.

In September 1986, the increased offertory program was started. Albin Chominski and Boleslaw Wojewodka served as co-chairmen for this project. A total of approximately 200 parishioners volunteered to serve on committees and as solicitors. Every member of the parish listed on parish records was personally contacted. This program resulted in many names being dropped from the list of those to receive envelopes and who would not be considered eligible for any future service from the parish. Weekly contributions increased on average from $3,000.00 to $4,000.00.

In 1987, our 85th Anniversary was celebrated by a special mass and by a couple of Polish Heritage Dinner Dances held in the auditorium. In February 1988, Archbishop Anthony J. Bevilaqua came to Philadelphia diocese to replace Cardinal Krol. Adam Sleza, Joan Abrams, Stanley Stetina, Tom Murphy, Stanley Rzucidlo and Ginger Antonelli once again managed the Catholic Charities Appeal. It is to be noted that the parish met or exceeded the Diocesan goal on this and all other charity appeals. On May 29, 1988, Boleslaw S. Wojewodka was ordained as permanent Deaconate. St. Hedwig's was the first Polish Parish in the Archdiocese to have an ordained permanent deacon.

1989- On November 16, 1989, the day of the infamous tornado, severe damage was done to the church. The tornado destroyed our two largest windows in the sanctuary area, also damaged our two steeples. Estimated cost $70,000.00 each window and $52,000.00 for the steeples. Insurance covered a small portion of the cost. It was determined that the original windows could not be replaced so the windows were repaired and covered by plain Plexiglas.

1991- The Diocesan fund drive "Catholic Life 2000" was started. It was co-chaired by Albin Chominski and Rev. Mr. Boleslaw S. Wojewodka. St. Hedwig's was assigned a goal of $220,000.00. The highest goal of all Chester parishes. This diocesan goal was determined by a formula based on parishioners' weekly contributions. The parishioners were requested to make signed pledges,
payable over a period of five (5) years or less. As of March 31, 1992, St. Hedwig's parishioners pledged $191,300.00.

1992 - St. Hedwig’s Parish celebrated its 90th Anniversary. On September 27, 1992, the most Reverend Louis A. DeSimone, D.D. Auxiliary to the Archbishop of Philadelphia, celebrated a mass of Thanksgiving. Reception and dinner followed at the Ramada Inn, Essington, Pennsylvania. Dr. John A. Kaczenski chaired the Anniversary committee and the Banquet chairman was Judy McCloskey.

A letter from the Cardinal, dated September 27, 1992 to Reverend Reynold A. Czarnota, stated the following: "On the happy occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of St. Hedwig’s Church, I am grateful for the opportunity to express my sincere congratulations and prayerful best wishes. As you reflect with gratitude upon your glorious history, you can also look to the future with hope and confidence".

1991 to 1993 - These were the years that can be characterized as the darkest years St. Hedwig’s Parish has encountered in its 100-year history. Our faith, heritage, strength, passion, and love of God have been severely tested by this diocesan command. "St. Hedwig’s will be closed".

A brief synopsis of events follows, but detailed letters, bulletins, reports, and newspaper articles covering the planning, decision-making, proposals, meetings, demonstrations, personal letters are available in historical files. The first indication of what the future may hold for the church- es in Chester was that in 1990, the diocese prepared a selected data of items for the Chester planning area of five elements of a faith community for the city of Chester.

In November 1991, the diocese established the "Chester Regional Planning Steering Group" with representatives from each parish, plus the diocese. The group met monthly. Rev. R. Czarnota and Sister Mary Austin, our school principal represented St. Hedwig’s. This group was charged to come up with ideas, to review the problems, and suggest solutions. Also to inform parishioners on progress being made and to include their ideas into the overall planning process.

On December 15, 1992, after a year of meetings, the Chester Planning Committee reported the following: There have been many opportunities for the Catholic Community to provide input and express their opinions. People have been heard. The proposal has been finalized. It went through many drafts. The proposal is being forwarded to the Cardinal. We do not expect to hear from him before March 1993.

We recommend the following:

1. All our six (6) parishes be suppressed and one (1) new parish be established with a new name.

2. One worship site at St Robert's, but Sunday worship continues temporarily at Immaculate Heart, St Anthony and St Hedwig.

3. Six rectories be consolidated into one at St Robert’s.
As the result of the above recommendations, St. Hedwig's Church was notified by a letter dated June 14, 1993 signed by the Cardinal. "After prayerful reflection and a lengthy process of consultation, the difficult decision to suppress St Hedwig's Parish has been made. I write to convey formal notification that this suppression will become effective July 1, 1993". "Given the dwindling number of faithful at St Hedwig's Parish, the spiraling costs of maintaining the parish and in view of our serious shortage of priests, the suppression of St Hedwig's Parish is the only feasible course of action. The following measures will be affected in the process of suppression: St Hedwig's Church will be closed as of July 1, 1993. Provision for worship at the present site of St. Hedwig's Church will; however, be permitted not beyond January 1, 1996. The sacramental records of St Hedwig's Church will be kept at Blessed Katherine Drexel Church.

REACTION AND EVENTS BY ST. HEDWIG'S PARISHIONERS

During the tumultuous years of 1991 to 1993, under their motto "St. Hedwig's Forever", the parishioners refused to accept the fact that they should lose their church. The church that was built by their forefathers and for their love and faith in God, and their willingness to sacrifice their time and treasure for a large part of their life, the very thought was incomprehensible. They became stronger in their faith and heritage. Supported by their beliefs and faith, they became a prayerful and vocal family. Led by the younger parishioners, Sam & Wanda Durbano, Judy McCloskey, Mickey Schad, Bob Klecko, Sophie Litwa, Helen Nowak, and hundreds of others. The parishioners attended all open meetings in large numbers and voiced their objections and suggestions. Wrote letters to the Chester Steering Committee, conducted protests at various churches where special Masses were taking place. Contacted politicians and requested their support. Encouraged parishioners to express their feelings by letters to the diocese and anyone else that could help, even the Vatican. Published critical cartoons in the newspapers, placed paid ads in various publications, such as Delaware County Daily Times, Philadelphia Inquirer and Polish National publications. Organized a 60-member live candlelight human rosary outside of St. James High School while a meeting concerning the closure was going on. Requested help from the Polish American Congress, which published a supporting article in the Daily Times, and also resulted in a private meeting between the Cardinal and the President, Mr. Michael Blichasz. Mr. Blichasz personally presented the trauma and the deep feelings and concerns that we have for our church, Polish heritage, and the love of God.

In 1993, after receipt of the June 14, 1993 Cardinal's suppression letter, it was determined by
the parishioners, that a central unified organization was needed and would be most effective in presenting arguments, opinions, facts, and in expressing and demonstrating the parishioners side of the story. The Polish American Heritage Association of Delaware County, St. Hedwig’s Society, was formally established with a constitution and by-laws with the following mission: "This association offers to all of Polish descent throughout Delaware County and surrounding communities an organized body interested in promotion of all activities which perpetuate the spirit, fellowship, customs, and Polish traditions handed down to us from our dedicated ancestors". PAHA is presently led by President, Sam Durbano; Vice President, David Chominski; Secretary, Judy McCloskey; and Treasurer, Mickey Schad. Board Members represent all organizations of St. Hedwig’s Chapel.

LIFE AFTER SUPPRESSION

1993 - Under the administration of Blessed Katherine Drexel, Sunday masses were scheduled at 9:00 AM in English and 10:30 AM in Polish. Daily masses in the chapel at 7:00 AM in English. Administrator: Rev. John B. Wendrychowicz, Associate Pastors, Rev. Edward Hallihan and Rev. Russell J. Donnelly. This arrangement was in effect to June 5, 1994.

1994 - St. Hedwig’s became a worship site, a Chapel, and a part of Sacred Heart Parish, Clifton Heights, PA. On June 26, 1994, Rev. Father Francis Barszczewski became the pastor of Sacred Heart Parish. Rev. Jan Palkowski, Assistant Pastor, and Msgr. Francis J. Urbanowicz, Pastor Emeritus. Father Frank and Father Jan met with the parishioners from St. Hedwig’s Chapel, in the social room, on June 28, 1994. He assured the parishioners that most things in the parish would remain the same. Masses on Sunday 9:00 AM in English, 10:30 AM in Polish. Weekday masses at 7:00 AM. Weddings and baptismals to be discontinued. Last wedding at St. Hedwig’s took place in November 1994. Rev. Mr. B. Wojewodka became officially the deacon for both Sacred Heart Parish and St. Hedwig’s Chapel.

1996 - Quarterly meetings were and are being held by all parish members, finance, council, and pastoral council are being held to discuss common problems and parish business. On September 15, 1996, St. Hedwig’s parishioners completed a survey to decide several suggestions on mass schedules. The parishioners voted for 9:00 AM mass in English and 10:30 mass in Polish.

1997 - At the January 23, 1997 parish meeting, repairs to St. Hedwig’s church roof were discussed. A bid of $18,840.00 was received but possibilities of additional damage and cost would have to be considered. On August 10, 1997, it was determined that a permanent Repair Fund Committee should be established. Albin Chominski, Dr. John Kaczenski, John Sarnocinski, and Adam Slezak were appointed to serve. Joseph Sewruk was appointed to the committee to replace John Kaczenski. Since inception of the committee to current date, we have expended $52,000.00 on indoor repairs and $104,000.00 on outdoor repairs. Major outdoor repairs were done to the roof, parking lot, windows, and church structure. Indoor repairs were paint and plaster, bells, sound system and carpet. Judy McCloskey, David Chominski, and Dr. John Kaczenski were elected to serve on the Parish Council.

1999 - On Sunday, June 6, 1999, the Vicar of Delaware County, Rev. Thomas J. Smith visited St. Hedwig’s Chapel. After mass, he attended a breakfast social in the social room and visited with the parishioners. On July 4, 1999, a bilingual mass on Sunday was started at 9:30 AM. Wanda Durbano was elected to serve on the Parish Council.

2000 - Barbara Ostapowicz and Frances Kwapisz were elected to the Parish Council. Rev. Father Jan Palkowski was transferred from Sacred Heart Parish to St. John Cantius Parish, Philadelphia, effective October 18, 2000. This transfer left Sacred Heart Parish with one priest, Msgr. Francis Barszczewski. Daily mass at St. Hedwig’s was discontinued. The shortage of priests has become relevant. Thanks to the Almighty God, our good friend and benefactor, Msgr. Francis Feret, from St. Adalbert’s Parish, has been providing a Polish priest, Rev. Jerome H. Pohl and Rev. Thaddeus Gorka, to celebrate Sunday Mass and some funerals. Also, retired Rev. Father George Ostaszewski has volunteered his services. In these trying times, we cannot overlook our "God’s Little Helpers", who have stepped forward and contribute their labor and time to help St. Hedwig’s Chapel to function. Bob Klecko, Catherine Kozak, John & Rose Ozor, Eva Zielinski, Dr. John Kaczenski, Francis Kwapisz, Judy McCloskey, Mickey Schad, David Chominski, Nancy Tokarowski and her choir angels, Sam Durbano, Edward & Robert Ostapowicz, Edward & AJ Rich, Brittany Carey, and Jason McCloskey. Ginger Antonelli, Parish Secretary and Brian Litwa, Janitor and Property Caretaker.

2001 to 2002 - Sylvia Lyszczek was elected to the Parish Council. In the latter part of 2001, planning and preparation for the celebration of the 100th Jubilee celebration was started. Judy McCloskey and David Chominski are co-chairmen; Wanda Durbano, Secretary; Mickey Schad, Treasurer. Various committees were selected and monthly meetings were started. Various social and moneymaking activities were planned to help alleviate expenses. The first event was the Anniversary Opening Mass held on November 9, 2001. A weekly 50-50 drawing was initiated. Other events held to date were Roast Beef Dinner, Paczkowy Bal, Spaghetti Dinner, Swieconka Breakfast. Miscellaneous drawings were and are taking place. Memorabilia pictures are being posted in the social room depicting historical events and former and present parishioners. Led by the Rev. B. Wojewodka, Majowka (Evening Prayers with Our Lady) was held every Wednesday and Friday evening during the month of May in the Grotto area. A beautiful service with rosary and polish songs dedicated to our Blessed Mother Mary. Enjoyed by an average of 28 parishioners.

May procession was held in Church due to rain. After Mass, a light brunch was held in the parish social room. In June, a casino trip was run by the United Polish Societies to Atlantic City.
Parishioners participated in an outdoor Corpus Christi (Blood of Christ) procession led by our Shepherd Rev. Father George Ostaszewski. This was a windy but a sunny morning. A good group was in attendance.

Tickets for the 100th Anniversary Banquet to be held on November 9, 2002 at the Holiday Inn Select in Claymont, Delaware went on sale in June. Four hundred tickets were sold in eight days. Due to the great interest to attend the banquet, more tickets had to be ordered and more dining space had to be set up to accommodate the overflow of guests.

Summer 2002 was a hot summer and all were eagerly looking forward to a festive celebration in November.

October is Polish American Heritage Month and over eighty faithful from St. Hedwig's walked or rode a trolley in the Pulaski Day Parade in Philadelphia. The parishioners and friends of St. Hedwig's walked with the Polish National Alliance Division. A float honoring Saint Hedwig was created with beautiful pictures of St. Hedwig and St. Hedwig's Church. This parade was televised on Channel 6 WPVI so thousands of TV viewers saw that we were celebrating 100 years serving the Community of Faith in Delaware County.

Polish National Alliance Lodge 650 held a breakfast in the social room celebrating Polish American Heritage Month.

Our faithful jubilarians and parishioners in some nursing homes were presented flowers in marking our one hundred years.

Saturday, November 9, 2002, a bright sunny, warm day, a Mass of Thanksgiving celebrated by Pastor Rev. Monsignor Francis Barszczewski and concelebrants Rev. Monsignor John Jagodzinski, Rev. Father Francis Opps, priest sons of the parish, along with Rev. Monsignor Bernard Witkowski, Rev. Monsignor Francis Feret, Rev. Monsignor Robert Grudowski, Rev. Father Jerome Pohl, Rev. Father Jan Palkowski, Rev. Father Joseph Zingaro, Rev. Father George Ostaszewski, and Deacon Rev. Mr. Boleslaw Wojewodka. Unfortunately, there was no representation from our Archdiocese. An invitation was declined by the Archbishop Cardinal Anthony Bevilaqua.

The Church was beautifully decorated by Robert Klecko. The Centennial choir, known as St. Cecelia Choir of St. Hedwig's, under the leadership of Nancy Tokorowski led the congregation with Polish hymns. Parts of the Mass were said in English, Polish, and Latin. Most pews were filled with Bernadine Sisters of St. Francis, daughters of the parish and past teachers of St. Hedwig's, parishioners, friends, representatives of Polish American Congress, Eastern Pennsylvania District, children dressed in Polish costumes, and neighboring pastors of the Orthodox Rite. In attendance were Rev. Father Gerald Ozlanski from Saint Mary's Ukrainian Orthodox Church and Archpriest Vincent Severino from Saint Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church.

Following the Mass, a banquet was held at the Holiday Inn Select Hotel in Claymont, Delaware with six hundred fifty guests. A room was set up as a memorabilia room called "walk down memory lane" with pictures of old and recent events and history of St. Hedwig's Church. Rev.
Monsignor Bernard Witkowski was the main speaker. Monsignor Bernie spoke of the people and their love of Saint Hedwig's and their faith. The guests were treated to a performance by the Polish Intercollegiate "PKM" dancers with dances of Poland. "Our Gang Orchestra" provided the music for the evening. Many people traveled a distance as far as Arizona, Virginia, and Massachusetts to come home for this great celebration. The day was a success!

The love for their Church, St. Hedwig's, inspired the committee members and parishioners to work hard for two years to make this event a success. As we begin our next Hundred Years, we ask God to continue to bless us with faith, love and pride in our rich Polish Heritage.

by David Chominski

Source: Parish Website:
http://www.oldchesterpa.com/churches/st_hedwig_church.htm