At the turn of the century many Poles, who had a desire to work and to obtain relief from religious and political persecution in their native land, migrated to the United States. Their search for work was successful in the industrial and mining communities. The new community of Monessen, which was founded in 1897, by W. H. Donner and other developers, but officially incorporated on September 3, 1898, offered this opportunity to them. Many Polish immigrants settled in Monessen, a town approximately thirty miles south of Pittsburgh along the Monongahela River. M. J. Alexander of Pittsburgh, who was Mr. Donner’s sales manager for the town’s tin mill, coined the name for the town, using the first syllable of the name of the river with the name of Germany’s great steel city, Essen.

The newness of the country, customs, friends, and way of life, was indeed strange to the many Polish immigrants. Many adjustments had to be made. However, there was one thing they had in common - their faith in God and their native tongue. There was a need to worship God in their own native language.

With this purpose in mind, the St. Michael Archangel Society, (Group 333, of the Polish Roman Catholic Union) dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, was organized on December 29, 1907. When the membership reached 60 families, a committee was formed to obtain a Roman Catholic Church for the Poles in Monessen and vicinity. This committee was made up of Peter Poplawski, Jacob Centnarowski, Joseph Wawrzynski, and Lawrence Rodak.

The first job of the committee was to raise funds, and their efforts produced good results. From January 1, 1909, until May 1909, they raised $1,500 for the church building fund.

The committee then sought the aid of Rev. Father Ladislaus Odziemczewski, pastor of the Holy Name of Mary Church in Donora. With his help and guidance, they approached His Excellency, The Most Rev. Regis Canavin, Bishop of the Diocese; of Pittsburgh, who understood their need for a parish for the Polish-speaking people in the Monessen area. Bishop Canavin agreed that they should have a church of their own. Where they and their children could worship and praise Gael in their native tongue, where they could sing and listen to the ancient hymns of their people, and thus preserve their Polish heritage in this new land. He then appointed Rev. Father John Rokosz as pastor to organize the people of Polish descent in Monessen and to establish a parish under the title of St. Hyacinth.
Father Rokosz arrived on May 1, 1909, and he had his first service for the Polish people in Monessen on May 30, 1909, in a storeroom on Donner Avenue between Third and Fourth Streets. The use of the building was obtained by a Polish parishioner by the name of Michael Konopinski. In these temporary church quarters, Father Rokosz administered the sacrament of Baptism to Michael Jasiak, son of Michael and Maryanna Jasiak. This is the first Baptism to be recorded. Church records also show that the first funeral mass of the parish was said for the repose of the soul of Ladislaus Swierzbien, age 22, who died in June, 1909. The first marriage, which was recorded on July 29, 1909, was that of Joseph Kubiak and Barbara Wilinska.

The zeal and energy of this Polish speaking priest aroused the enthusiasm of the people, and in a short time the parish grew to 200 families. These families were not only Monessen people, but families from other communities - Charleroi, Arnold City, Pricedale, Belle Vernon, and Vesta - communities which had no Polish-speaking priest or church to meet their spiritual needs.

Six lots on Reed and Rostraver were purchased for $3,400, and the building of the church began. The cost of the church building was $2,980. The new church was dedicated by Rev. Ladislaus Odziemczewski on September 19, 1909.

The structure and size of the church was the same as it is today. The wooden frame building originally had no upstairs choir loft. The choir was located in a slightly elevated section in the right rear of the church. A simple melodeon type organ was used. The main altar was of hand-carved wood painted white with a gold trim. A large picture of St. Hyacinth hung above the altar. Two similar pictures of the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin Mary hung above the side altars. Gaslights were used. Plain, ordinary benches and wooden kneelers were used as pews. Approximately 300 people could occupy the church.

The parishioners were most generous and sincere. Many people lent money to the church. All these loans were repaid with or without interest.

The first child baptized in the church was Robert Tudykowski, (October 2, 1909). The first wedding in the newly built church occurred on October 25, 1909, when Anthony Kryczynski and Bertha Rybka were married. In November of 1909, the first funeral mass was for an adult parishioner was said for the repose of the soul of Mary Sobocinska, age 34.

The first church organist was Mr. Slowik. In October, 1909, the Rosary Society, the first women’s organization in the parish was organized.

A year later in September, 1910, Father Rokosz purchased for the parish three lots and the parish house on Knox Avenue for the sum of $5,250. Prior to this time, Father Rokosz resided at the old Kilroy Hotel until the church was built, and then occupied a temporary rectory on Reed Avenue.

Rev. Father Wenceslaus Wisniewski took over the duties as pastor of St. Hyacinth in June, 1914. During his pastorate, the home for sisters on Reed Avenue was purchased, and the Men’s Adoration Society was organized. Father Wisniewski worked for the good of the souls of the parishioners as well as for their material needs. He helped many parishioners to obtain work. He was transferred to St. Columbkill, Imperial, Pa., in May, 1918. Father Wisniewski died December 31, 1945 in Connellsville, Pennsylvania.
On May 15, 1918, Rev. Father Adalbert Garstka became pastor. It didn't take much time for Father Garstka to become acquainted with his parishioners. In the fall of that year, Father Garstka shared the joy of the parishioners at the arrival of the Sisters of Nazareth who came to teach the children. He comforted those who mourned the death of their loved ones who died during the influenza epidemic during World War I. During the months of October and November of 1918, 41 deaths were recorded.

During this fourth pastorate all outstanding bills and mortgages were paid, and two rooms were added to the convent. The statue of St. Anthony was presented to the church by the John Liszewski family. The large pictures at the side altars were replaced by the present statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. These statues were a gift of Josephine Wos Wisniewski.

With the generous assistance of the Pittsburgh Steel Company, Father Garstka succeeded in procuring a beautiful site of over seven acres for the parish cemetery. Arrangements for the purchase of this land, formerly known as the John Irons tract, began in 1928, and were completed on February 26, 1929. The first person to be buried in the parish cemetery was an infant, Alex Lupinski, age five months. Peter Sowinski, age 48, was the first adult to be buried in St. Hyacinth Cemetery. May their souls and all the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace.

The parish made plans for a new school during Father Garstka’s pastorate, raising the sum of $22,000 for this purpose. The building was never erected. Investments which were made did not prove to be beneficial. The closing of the banks in 1931, also contributed to the loss of funds. Thus, in 1931, the parish had to begin all over again financially.

Father Garstka, who spent 14 years as pastor of St. Hyacinth, also observed his silver jubilee of priesthood in 1928. In 1932, he was transferred to St. Josephat Parish in Pittsburgh. Here he continued to serve God until his death in 1954.

Rev. Father Thomas Zacharski, who was pastor of St. Patrick in Canonsburg, for 21 years, became the next pastor of St. Hyacinth on July 16, 1932. At the time of his arrival there were about 150 families, and he had the difficult task of rejuvenating the parish spiritually and materially. His pious manner, zeal, and personality moved the hearts of the parishioners, for they quickly rallied to his plea for harmony and effort. In a short time he remodeled the church. One of his biggest improvements in the church was the installation of a new ceiling and a new heating system. The old stoves in the school caused a fire which swept the school on a winter night in 1934, and the damage necessitated the rebuilding of the classrooms. The church itself was not seriously damaged. During the rebuilding of the school, classes were held at the Polish Hall on Knox Avenue and the Polish Hall on Third Street.

During Father Zacharski’s pastorate the parish celebrated two silver anniversaries. In 1933, Father Zacharski celebrated his 25 years of priesthood; and in 1934, the parish observed its silver jubilee. A souvenir booklet was published at that time and some of the information contained in this history was taken from that booklet.

Father Zacharski had great plans for the future; however, the plans never materialized for Almighty God called him to his eternal reward on October 10, 1936. His funeral was one of the largest, ever held in Monessen. He was buried in a family plot next to his mother at the St. Patrick Cemetery.
Canonsburg.

Rev. Father Adam Jurczyk of Mi. Pleasant ministered to the parish until an official appointment was made by Bishop Hugh C. Boyle.

The news of the appointment of Rev. Father, John L. Pudlo as pastor of St. Hyacinth revived the mourning parish. Father Pudlo, who served as chaplain for the Felician Sisters in Coraopolis, assumed his duties on October 29, 1936. The parish was indeed honored to have such a priest, renowned not only locally but nationally and internationally. Father Pudlo was a true Polish patriot, and his love for his home land inspired the parishioners. No religious activity which was held for the good of the Polish people was ever undertaken without his active participation. Regardless of who initiated the program, as long as it was good for the Polish cause, Father Pudlo supported it. Even the Polish Consul visited Father Pudlo in Monessen. Father Pudlo was a very energetic priest, and he did much to improve parish property and especially the cemetery. In the church he began where Father Zacharski, left off. Regular church pews and kneelers were installed. A vestibule was built at the entrance of the church. The exteriors of all church buildings were covered with inselbric. Colored glass windows replaced transparent paper covered glass window panes. The present choir loft was built and in 1937 a new organ was dedicated. A religious concert by 20 young men from the St. Michael Church in Pittsburgh, under the direction of Prof. V. Kotlarz, was presented. Shrubs, trees, and hedges were planted around the church.

Father Pudlo inaugurated the system of church envelopes for Sunday collections, and feeling a need for a likeness of the patron saint of the parish, he purchased the present statue of St. Hyacinth. At the cemetery he built new roads, planted trees and shrubs, and dedicated and blessed the huge concrete cross. At the dedication ceremonies he expressed a wish to be buried at the right of the cross. Little did anyone realize that God would fulfill his wish so soon, for he met his eternal reward on February 4, 1943. He was laid to rest to the right of the cross.

Once again Rev. Father Adam Jurczyk administered the sorrowing parish during the interim between appointments.

In March 1943, Rev. S. M. Dembinski became pastor. Father Dembinski came from the St. Albert Church, Palmer Mines, Ada, Pa., where he was pastor for five years. St. Hyacinth was his second pastorate.

Warmly and sincerely, Father Dembinski labored for the betterment of the parish. He continued the rejuvenating program. Many improvements were made in the church. However, the remodeling of the sanctuary was the biggest project. The old and ornate altar was replaced with a liturgical altar. The installation of any new church altar must meet certain ecclesiastical requirements, and so a simple wood table type altar centered with a circular golden tabernacle, was installed. The conopaeum, the hanging cloth of the tabernacle, changes in color with the liturgical colors of the season. A dossal or curtain of red velvet and a large crucifix hang above the altar. A baldaquin or canopy is suspended above the altar. This liturgical altar was the first of its kind to be built in Monessen.

New church doors, stations of the cross, and baptismal font were purchased. The rectory was remodeled extensively. Church grounds were blacktopped. At the cemetery a new entrance was
built, and the adjacent picnic grounds were improved. Many of these projects were completed by the parishioners themselves. Father Dembinski, full of energy and zeal, enjoyed working with the group and always succeeded in obtaining their cooperation for a worthy project.

In 1949, the Franciscan Sisters arrived to teach the school children. Mrs. Ann Rendos was hired as organist. She was the first lady organist in thirty years.

On June 28, 1950, Father Dembinski was transferred to the Holy Cross Parish in Glassport, where he assumed the responsibility of building a new church. He accomplished his goal, and at present is still pastor at Holy Cross.

Rev. Joseph Nowakowski, the present pastor, assumed the pastorate of St. Hyacinth in July 1950. This was Father Nowakowski's first parish. He was formerly an assistant at St. Adalbert, South Side, Pittsburgh. The parish welcomed this young and intelligent priest at a testimonial dinner given in his honor all August 20 at the P. N. A. Hall, which was fined to capacity. His warm smile, patience, and understanding won the hearts of his parishioners who helped him complete many improvements in the rectory, the school, the church, the cemetery, and especially the convent. The Sister's home was completely refurnished and redecorated, and with the financial help of the Rosary Society, padded kneelers were purchased and installed in the church. His zealous efforts resulted in the continuation of the parochial school for grades one thru eight under the supervision of the Franciscan Sisters. The organization of the Parent Teachers Guild uncover his direction has proven most beneficial to the school, home, and parish.

Some other accomplishments during Father Nowakowski pastorate are a men's chalk directed by Mr. Carl Wapiennik an outdoor statue of the Sacred Heart purchased by the then active Young Men's Club; the weekly Sunday Bulletin; and church bells electrically set to ring automatically for daily devotions and the Angelus. At the cemetery the land was surveyed and divided into plots.

Since the beginning of the St. Hyacinth parish, the sacrament of baptism has been administered 2,875 times; 645 marriages have been performed; and 650 deaths have been recorded. From the original parishioners of the parish (September, 1909) there are still 27 active members today.