The story of Our Lady of Częstochowa R.C. Church.
Custom Book - Our Lady of Częstochowa Church, South Plainfield, NJ, p 4-17. CAP at Orchard Lake.

Dedication Day

Alleluja! Alleluja! Alleluja! Let us shout for joy! The church of Our Lady of Częstochowa, in South Plainfield, New Jersey was completed and dedicated on December 5, 1976, just thirty-three years and seven months after the first service was held in the Venetian Hall on April 18, 1943.

Every story has a beginning. The building of the church, Our Lady of Częstochowa, began with a seed of hope deeply planted in the hearts of a group of Polish families who settled in the vicinity of South Plainfield.

The majority of these Polish families attended the local Catholic church, Sacred Heart. To administer to the spiritual needs of these people, visiting priests were invited periodically to hear confessions in Polish and to serve the Poles in any capacity deemed necessary.

To Reverends Arthur Strenski from St. Joseph’s Parish in Camden; John Szeja, St. Joseph’s Parish in New Brunswick; Chester Jasionowski, Our Lady of Częstochowa in Bound Brook; and Right Reverend Monsignor Maximilian Wujek, St. Mary’s Parish in South River, ”Bog Zaplac“ for the sacrifices they made so that others might receive the Word of God in their native language.

In 1937 Reverend Jerome Pionkowski was appointed as an assistant pastor in Sacred Heart Church. It was at this time that a group — Mrs. Rose Brodzik, Mrs. Catherine Phillips,

Mrs. Veronica Aniunas, Mrs. Louise Leach, and Mr. and Mrs. Antone Phillips — approached Father Edward A. Corrigan with a petition to permit a Polish sermon at one of the Masses. Permission for this was granted.

Reverend Charles Poltorak arrived in 1942 as an assistant to Father Lyons, then pastor of Sacred Heart. Polish-Americans attending Mass in Sacred Heart met with Father Poltorak as a committee to discuss the possibility of having a sermon in Polish at the last Mass on Sundays. From this successful venture, a stirring of emotions swelled. The original committee grew in number. Hopes in the hearts of the Polish-Americans beat harder and stronger.


Monsignor Wujek met with His Excellency, the Most Reverend William A. Griffin, to discuss the possibility of forming a Polish parish. The committee and Monsignor Wujek held many meetings.
Hours were spent in exploring and planning for the new parish.

During this time Monsignor Wujek wrote to the Pope in Rome, Pius XII, requesting the establishment of a national church in the Trenton Diocese. From this communication came a Papal Bull which sanctioned the newest national church in the Trenton Diocese.

Early in 1943, the committee and Monsignor Wujek had an audience with Bishop Griffin in Sacred Heart Rectory to obtain permission to begin work on the project. The Ordinary of the diocese nominated Monsignor Wujek to survey the needs of these people and as a consequence to consider the founding of Our Lady of Częstochowa Parish.

The Venetian Hall was rented as a temporary church. On Palm Sunday, April 18, 1943, the first Mass was offered. The celebrant on this occasion was Monsignor Wujek. At this time, the first pastor, Reverend Ladislaus Madura, was presented to the congregation. From this point in time, regular services were held.

The seed was planted. Symbolically all that was needed was love, care and food to nourish the growth and direction of another of God's creations, for surely none of this would have come to pass without His blessing. "And there came food" in the form of gifts — Stations of the Cross, altar, statues, vestments for services — from Monsignor Wujek, Reverend Walter Urbanik from Sacred Heart Parish of South Amboy, and Reverend Alexander Maciejewski from St. Stanislaus Church in Sayreville. The first donor for the new church was Mr. Paul Dlugosz of Elizabeth, New Jersey, who gave fifty dollars.

"And then there came love" from the young and the old, through their attendance and services to the temporary church. Altar boys who served in the Venetian Hall were Anthony Jaskulski, Adolph Phillips, Richard Ardowski, Harold Miktus, John Juva, Stanley Juva, and Robert Ziemb.

In a short time, a choir was formed under the direction of Henrietta Zieliński who also served as the first organist. Choir members were Michael and John Mazurkiewicz, Francis Gubernat, Frank Hudzik, Katherine Banul, Eleanor and Helen Brodzik, Katherine Sroka, Helen and Chestelle Malecki, Anna Aniunas, Mary Bagińska, Helen Stefko, Ann and Josephine Jarema and Viola Pitera.

Miss Eleanor Brodzik became the first president of the Sodality. Other Sodalists who served were Irene and Wanda Blaszk, Jean Ardowski, Anna and Stella Aniunas, Katherine Banul, Alice and Celia Juva, Mary and Sally Jaskulski, Helen and Chestelle Malecki and Frances Welc.

On May 30th, 1944, the first May Crowning ceremony was held with Wanda Blaszk participating as the first Crowner of Our Lady of Częstochowa Church. The sermon was given by Reverend Martin Madura. Services to the Sacred Heart of Jesus were held in June for the unveiling of the statue offered by Reverend Maciejewski. For this occasion, Father Pionkowski came from Glassboro, New Jersey, to give the homily.

A summer school program was initiated in August of 1943 under the tutelage of the Bernadine Sisters from South River, New Jersey. At this time a Rosary Society was formed but was not formally installed until April of the following year.

**New Church Needed**

The faithful attended services and it soon became apparent to all that a church building at another site was necessary to satisfy the dreams and the hopes of the Polish people. Gradually, funds were
gathered for the procurement of a site for a church. The altar boys held a card party, the Sodality had a dance, and the first parish bazaar under the chairmanship of Adam Phillips netted $1,107.49. The first bingo brought in $17.79. The mothers held a card party and realized a sum of $168.96. It was at this time that Monsignor Wujek graciously extended a helping hand. Through his kind donation, a site consisting of four lots on Hamilton Boulevard was obtained.

A building committee was formed. Serving on it were Joseph Ochab, Walter Welc, Ralph Aniunas, Walter Grusczynski, Frank Hudzik and Anthony Jaskulski.

Construction for the duration of the war was impossible. However, a vacant building measuring twenty-four by seventy-two feet from Camp Kilmer became available. Again Monsignor Wujek, through a handsome donation, helped the dream to become a reality. The building was moved to the new foundation on Hamilton Boulevard.

Townley's Construction Company from South River, in cooperation with Walter Kulas, Alexander Stachowski and Joseph Wiater, who sacrificed time and energy, completed the construction of the building and transformed it into a House of God for people to gather together, to pray together as one family.

From the onset friends from other areas had shown kind hearts. Donations, church furniture and equipment came from many kind friends. From Reverend Francis Wladasza, Infant of Jesus Church, Stamford, New York, came the church benches, railings and bell; from Monsignor Martin Lipinski of St. Hedwig's Church in Trenton, New Jersey, came the ceiling lights and the Stations of the Cross.

The Bernadine Sisters continued to commute from South River, New Jersey. Sisters M. Teófila, Emerencyanna, Reginald and Georgiana taught the choir to sing Polish hymns, and instructed the children in religion.

Just eight months later on the first Sunday of Advent, 1943, religious services were first held in the new church. Dedication took place on May 21, 1944. The following year, in order to extend facilities, a building was purchased at 1411 Hamilton Boulevard. This building served as a convent, and provisions were made for two classrooms with a meeting place for church organizations. These quarters soon became inadequate and on the Fifth Anniversary in 1948 another building, the recreation hall, was added to the parish plant. Since then the hall has been invaluable to the services of the church. The Confraternity classes, the Rosary Society, the Holy Name Society and the parishioners have enjoyed the building's facilities.

One organization which utilized the Parish Hall was St. Theresa's Society, instituted in the year 1944 by the pastor, Father Madura. It formed a Merchandise Club, and profits from this project paid the tuition for the children of parishioners who desired their children to attend St. Peter's High School in New Brunswick. Another one of its projects was to furnish breakfast for the children attending Mass on the First Friday of each month. Mrs. Anna Aniunas and Mrs. Catherine Turay were the chairladies of this program.

The St. Theresa's Society consisted of the following members from the day of inception until 1961: Mrs. Anna Aniunas, Mrs. Dorothy Aniunas, Mrs. Helen Aniunas, Mrs. Sophie Bulava, Mrs. Stella Famularo, Mrs. Sophie Kieltyka, Mrs. Mildred Michaux, Mrs. Bertha Niemczyk, Mrs. Victoria Niemczyk, Mrs. Bertha Randolph, Mrs. Rita Sulzsinsky, Mrs. Helen Granski, Mrs. Catherine Turay and
Mrs. Elizabeth Wielichowski. Mrs. Lotti Kolinowski was also one of the society's first members.

Soon, Mr. Paul Reilly was commissioned as the architect to design a contemporary church for approximately three hundred families. Seacoast Company of Red Bank, New Jersey, under the supervision of Adolph Schulz received the construction contract. The church would cost approximately four hundred thousand dollars.

In 1953, the Brandt family sold its home on 120 Kosciusko Avenue to the parish. It became the present church rectory. In 1956 the Bernadine Sisters having completed their task returned to their convent in South River.

During the interim from 1956 to 1972, the church which had its beginning under the administration of Father Madura (1943-1962), continued to progress under the care of Father Francis Klimkiewicz (1962-1972), and prospered under the present pastor, Father John Skwara (1972-1976). On June 9, 1972, Father Skwara was appointed pastor of Our Lady of Częstochowa. The former pastor, Father Francis Klimkiewicz was appointed pastor of Sacred Heart Church in South Amboy.

The church population continued to increase in numbers and the original church building became inadequate. A new building was needed, designed to accommodate the parishioners' spiritual and physical needs. The old structure had fulfilled its original "reason for being." It was time to build a permanent edifice from which one could be filled with richness in spirit, strength in faith, generousness in charity and life through hope.

Thirty years after the first dedication, parishioners were asked to sacrifice once more. The drive for a new church was sparked with enthusiasm. Conferences were held with His Excellency, the Most Reverend Bishop George W. Ahr in Trenton for permission to build a new church to Our Lady of Częstochowa.

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**Ground Breaking**

On January 11, 1976, a typical cold wintry day, a loyal group of parishioners met to break ground for the new church, the first to be erected in the Bicentennial Year. Committees continued to work on various activities to raise money for the new structure. Dances were held, circuses were contracted, bake sales were scheduled, and country fairs were included in the ever-growing round of money-making affairs.

On March 25, 1976, the Feast of the Annunciation, three months after the ground-breaking ceremony, actual construction was started. It was fitting that construction started on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. During the nine months of construction, Masses were held in the Parish Hall.

In the summer of 1976 plans were formed to prepare for the dedication ceremony of the new building. As the building fund continued to grow, parishioners selected particular memorials as their special donations to the new church.
Mr. Victor Zucchi designed three statues which were carved in Italy from linden wood. The life size figures of the Resurrection of Christ, St. Joseph and Our Lady of Czestochowa are designed to inspire one's spiritual flame of love, faith, hope.

Commissioned by Father John Skwara, the Bogota artist executed full-size color sketches for each piece, carefully detailing every feature in preparation for the final carving. He worked approximately six months on the project. After approval of the Pastor, the full-size drawings and details along with coloring samples were sent to Maestro Sculptore Giac. Vincenzo Mussner, of Ortisei, Italy.

The town of Ortisei lies in the Ladin Valley of Gardena, Italian Tyrol. For thousands of years this dolomite valley remained isolated from the outside world, accessible only by difficult and inconvenient mule-tracks which passed over the rocky ridges. The Gardenese have been famous for three centuries for their wood-carving industry; there is no family that does not boast of at least one wood-carver. Giac. Vincenzo Mussner, being one of the oldest families in the valley, was selected by Victor Zucchi to execute this valued work.

Selected linden wood from Yugoslavia, aged for the minimum of seven years, was assembled for the work. Carefully laminated with best quality glues, the blocks of lindenwood were then rough carved to the dimensions of the full-size drawings.

Giac, Mussner then carved into the blocks, carefully following all the details of the drawings. Progress photos were sent to Victor Zucchi for approval as the stages proceeded.

After final approval of the carvings, Maestro Vincenzo then began the coloring and gold leafing process. Using 22-karat gold leaf, burnished with semi-precious agate stone, the desired brilliance and effect were attained.

Packed in special containers, the statues were then shipped to the United States for installation in the new church. This entire process from design to completion spanned approximately eighteen months.

The carved, free-standing, life-size statue is unique. It is the only statue of Our Lady of Częstochowa known to exist. Many pictures, icons, and busts of Our Lady of Częstochowa have been executed, but this statue, registered with the Italian government, is "one of a kind."

Like Our Lady's statue, each item is specifically designed to fit into the House of God — the altar, the tabernacle, the Stations of the Cross, the pews, the cross on the building. Each has its private message for someone — a message of faith, hope, and charity for all. The stained-glass windows which epitomize the highlights of the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Annunciation and the Nativity, are meant to touch all spiritually.

In October of 1976, the church was opened for Masses and special religious ceremonies. It was formally dedicated by the Bishop on December 5, 1976. By special request, Kathleen Ann Jackson was baptized on September 12, 1976, in the new church.

On October 9, 1976, the first funeral Mass in the new church was held for Veronica Aniunas, one of the founders of the church. Sunday, October 10th, Stanley Mozda, a former altar boy, was married to Bonnie Sue Post, and on that same day Donna Marie Dravis was christened. The first Sunday Mass was offered for the people on October 31, 1976.
On Sunday, December 5, 1976, thirty-three years following the first dedication of the temporary church, the new and permanent home of Our Lady of Czestochowa was dedicated.

His Excellency, Bishop Ahr, dedicated the church at a noon Mass with former pastors, Reverends Madura and Francis Klimkiewicz, as concelebrants with the present pastor, Reverend John Skwara. Frater Gerard H. Chylko, C.SS.R., gave an inspiring homily.

The church bears the title, Our Lady of Czestochowa, named after the miraculous Shrine of the Madonna of Poland. The successful efforts of the parishioners was realized through her spiritual assistance, and through the intercessions of prayers offered by the Polish people.

Miss Sylvia Brodzik, Editor