



History of the St. Hedwig's Church and Parish

*Golden Jubilee Rev. Gervase W. Kubec (1905-1955),
Floral Park, Long Island, NY 1955., s. 27-30*

THE POLISH HERITAGE IN AMERICA

Polish immigrants, who were settling in the New York — Long Island area since 1628, and namely those who settled in what is now Nassau County, for many years, felt the lack of a Roman Catholic parish, wherein the Polish language of their fathers would satisfy their spiritual demands and continue the strong religious life that was brought to the United States from Poland.

In order to attain this hope, a census roll of all the Polish families resident in the villages and areas of Floral Park, New Hyde Park, Garden City Park, Roslyn, Mineola, Hempstead, Elmont, was compiled in 1895. Then a mass meeting of those Polish families was convened in Garden City Park, in 1901, where it was agreed to elect delegates who would present a petition of organizing and building a Roman Catholic Church for Polish families to the Most Reverend Bishop of the Brooklyn Diocese, who would nominate a Polish pastor.

The petition was accepted and fulfilled. The delegates were Michael Wendelowski, Joseph and John Filarski, F. Makowski and Andrew Janosik, who did not waste time, but who energetically appealed to the Most Rev. Bishop Charles E. Mc Donnell for an audience to present the plan for the erection of a Polish Roman Catholic parish to assist the old and newly arriving Polish immigrants in fulfilling their spiritual life with a priest speaking their native tongue.

The Most Rev. Bishop McDonnell agreed in 1902 to the formation of a Roman Catholic Church under the patron saint, St. Hedwig, in Floral Park, New York, and named Rev. Adolf L. Swierczynski as the pastor.

The new Pastor quickly gathered the flock of faithful Polish immigrants into one group with Floral Park as the central location for the new parish. Before the new church was erected, Masses were held in the Filip Miller Hall at Miller Lane in New Hyde Park, the present site of the old Fire House.

The tasks of organization and collection of financial contributions for the new church were many and widespread. Rev. Swierczynski devoted days and evenings to the proposition, often riding a bicycle many miles to cover the distance of the prospective, faithful Polish farmer parishioners. The Polish families who settled here in 1900 were animal stock husbandrymen, farmers, potato farmers in particular and hard-working laborers, carpenters and craftsmen. With a relay of personal contacts made by the new pastor and by word of mouth passed on by the new Americans, sizeable sums were donated for the purchase of lands for the erection of the church building and rectory.

Land area of 20 acres on Jericho Turnpike, bounded by Depan and Linden avenues in Floral Park was purchased in 1902. Plans for the erection of the Church building were quickly made and progress of constructing the edifice of red brick and white mortar progressed so rapidly, that the Church cornerstone was blessed and laid on July 28, 1903.

St. Hedwig's Church is built in Gothic style that is common in the Poznan area of Poland, with three bells in the Bell Tower that mold into the one harmony. The consecration of the bells was performed by the Most Rev. Bishop C. E. McDonnell, D.D. October 1, 1905. After payment of the debts, St. Hedwig's Church was consecrated on July 15, 1906 by the Most Rev. Bishop Leon Haid, D.D.

Because of the large increase of the number of new Polish families and large numbers of children, Rev. Swierczynski, in the year 1906, initiated the building of a school and convent home. After constructing a four-room classroom school attached to the Convent, Felician teaching sisters from Buffalo were brought to St. Hedwig's and classes were taught in September, 1908.

In August 1911, Rev. Swierczynski left St. Hedwig's parish, and the Most Rev. Bishop C. E. McDonnell, D.D. announced the appointment of Rev. Francis L. Wilamowski as the new pastor. For 41 years, Rev. Wilamowski served St. Hedwig's parishioners. Father Wilamowski was born in Mlew, Poznań province, Poland, January 31, 1882. As a student he was a member of secret underground societies which fought against Prussianizing of Polish students by Bismarck. He began his religious studies at Collegium Marianum in Pelplin, Poland.

He came to the United States in September, 1903, settling first in Detroit, Michigan, where he attended the Polish Seminary of SS. Cyril and Methodius. He was ordained to Holy priesthood by Bishop McDonnell on May 30, 1907. His first assignment was as assistant curate to St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, Brooklyn. On August 17, 1911, he was assigned to serve as Pastor of St. Hedwig's. He was decorated by the Free Republic of Poland with the Cross Polonia Restituta for relief services the parish rendered during World War I.

When the small school house became overcrowded, plans for a new school were drawn and donations for the new edifice were made, and in May 1926 the plan of the new school with twelve classrooms was realized.

In 1927 the new two floor plan school building containing 12 classrooms, two large auditoriums, one of which serves as an assembly hall and Sunday Masses and the other as a cafeteria to feed the children was dedicated. The Parent-Teachers Club supervised the management of the cafeteria.

The school, which is conducted by Felician Order of teaching Sisters since 1906, today teaches over 600 pupils, is a first class fire-proof building. During World Wars I and II, St. Hedwig's School was selected as a safety zone in event of enemy air attack. Through the efforts of Pastor Rev. Wilamowski, the Church itself in 1951-1952 was refurbished, decorated, old altars replaced with new, a new organ installed, new pews, confessionals, Stations of the Cross, and from Italy, a marble baptismal font on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee in 1953 of the parish. The parish was completely without debt and valued above a half-million dollars in 1953.

After Rev. Wilamowski's passing away, Father Gerwazy Kubec was named the pastor of St. Hedwig's parish. Immediately, new plans for the improvement and renovation of the rectory and the grounds was instituted at a cost of \$90,000. In 1955 Rev. Kubec completed plans for the rebuilding

of the home for the parish priests. This project was completed last week. Plans for the renovation of the Convent and building improvements for the school are now considered. Another doorway to the Church is also being planned this year. With the generous assistance of the parishioners and wise leadership of the Pastor, St. Hedwig's parish will attain a completely enlarged and improved status as a firm institution.

Americans of Polish ancestry are proud of the achievements of the 54 years old St. Hedwig's Church, its School, Convent and its able Pastor and assistant priests. Parishioners are grateful for all the spiritual benefits derived through the efforts of all the two former pastors and hope that God will give good health to Rev. Kubec to complete his apostleship here.

St. Hedwig's Parish carefully kept Church records show that for the first fifty year 1,943 marriage sacraments were performed in St. Hedwig's. There were 5,283 children baptized into the Roman Catholic religion.

Value of St. Hedwig education is readily seen as one considers that since 1908, 9 girls were called to the Holy Vocation of the Felician Sisters and now are assigned as teachers, assistants, nurses as Felician nuns. Three men became priests from St. Hedwig's. Rev. Francis Makowski, the pastor of St. Josephat's in Bayside, Rev. John Mirecki, who sang his first Mass in St. Hedwig's June 5, this year, and Rev. Francis Powaza, who will sing his first Solemn Mass, Sunday, June 26 in St. Hedwig's Church. These workers for the Faith prove the close alliance between the Church and the Parochial School.

Among the prominent parish organizations which are in Church membership are St. Hedwig's Society, the oldest organization for men; St. Michael's, Rosary Society, Sacred Heart League, Sodality, Third Order of St. Francis, Parent-Teachers Club, Holy Name Society, Catholic War Veterans and their Auxiliary of Ladies, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Catholic League, and the Brownies and the Girl Scouts of America with four troops.

All that has been achieved in this parish in over a half a century was accomplished mainly through the help of the Lord and persons of zealous faith and good will.