

EARLIEST HISTORY

The history of the Polish national shrine of Czestochowa is a mirror of the tormented and troubled history of the nations of Central and Eastern Europe and a key to the understanding of their spiritual resistance during their present trials. According to the legend, St. Luke painted a portrait of the Blessed Virgin on the table made by Jesus Himself when He was an apprentice carpenter under the paternal guidance of St. Joseph. After the Crucifixion, this table was brought to Jerusalem; when the Holy City had fallen to the Romans the disciples kept it hidden during their wanderings. It was St. Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, who, while searching for the Holy Cross, found the picture of the Mother of Christ and took it to Constantinople.



The venerated portrait of the Virgin thus remained from the 3rd to the 8th century in Constantinople (called also Byzantium and Istanbul) in a church built for the purpose of housing the precious relic. In the troublesome 8th century the picture was again in great danger and was carried to the wilderness to be hidden in remote places like the forests of Belsk, in Eastern Poland. Even in that part of Europe there was no real peace, because of the migrations from the East which constantly moved westward.

During the first Tartar invasion of Europe the picture escaped harm. In 1382 the Tartars occupied Belsk, murdering and looting, but the portrait of the Holy Virgin was not discovered by the heathen invader, for a mysterious cloud enveloped the chapel. After the Tartars returned to their Asiatic homeland the Prince of Belsk was ordered in a dream by an angel to take the picture to an insignificant, obscure village named Czestochowa. There it was confided to the custody of the monks of St. Paul of

the Desert who have guarded it down to the present day.

MORE-ESTABLISHED HISTORY

Comparative calm reigned around Czestochowa until 1430 and the renown of the miraculous picture grew. During this time King Jagiello united Poland and Lithuania and himself became an ardent Christian. He built a great Gothic cathedral around Our Lady's Chapel, and kings, princes, noblemen and peasants provided the sanctuary with precious and priceless votive offerings. In 1430 a new danger appeared on the horizon as religious wars began to ravage this part of Europe. These were the first wars between the followers of Jan Hus and the Catholic princes. The Hussites attacked Czestochowa, murdered, burned, robbed and took the Holy Picture. There is a story that as they bore it away their horses stopped at the limits of the village and no beating could incite them to move forward. Thus the picture of the Virgin was saved. When the pious monks found the picture, retaken from the Hussites, it lay in the mud covered with earth and blood. They immediately wanted to clean it but found that all wells had gone dry in fighting the fire. It was at this time that a miraculous fountain sprung up, a spring that has supplied water to millions of pilgrims.

The Polish nation attributes its very existence to the help of the Virgin of Czestochowa. The veneration of the picture of the Madonna is the expression of the Polish nation's faith and gratitude. After the

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Hussite invasion the Poles fought for 300 years with the Teutonic Crusaders, and all the decisive victories won by the Polish nation in these battles are attributed to the miraculous help of the Holy Virgin. Thus the safety of the shrine of Czestochowa is identified with the very safety and independence of the whole nation.

During the wars with the Swedes in the 17th century, Czestochowa was besieged by the whole Swedish army for more than six weeks, but the army of the enemy was defeated and the invader driven from Polish soil. Thus Czestochowa again defended Polish unity and independence. The following year, 1656, the Holy Virgin was acclaimed Queen of Poland, and Czestochowa became the spiritual capital of the nation. But there was little peace around Czestochowa, for warfare continued first against the Princes of the Reformation, and then against the Turks who, having enslaved the whole Balkan Peninsula and the greater part of Hungary, had arrived at the very doors of Vienna. It was the last minute help of the Polish King Sobieski that saved Vienna and the West. Before Sobieski and his army undertook their crusade, he and his knights gathered at Czestochowa and dedicated themselves to their Mother in Heaven.

After the partition of Poland between Austria, Prussia, and Russia the Polish people, although divided into three different states under foreign domination, remained undivided in their faithfulness to Mary, Queen of Poland. In every Polish church there was and there is still a reproduction of the Madonna of Czestochowa.

When in 1919 Poland regained its independence the newly organized Soviet Russian Red Army immediately invaded the unified country and again the whole of Poland had recourse to its protectress. The Holy Eucharist was carried in procession in every city and every village; novenas were held to Our Lady of Czestochowa in each church.

On September 14, 1920, the Russians stood at the Vistula and threatened Warsaw. According to the legend on September 15th, the day of Our Lady of Sorrows, the Madonna appeared in the clouds above Warsaw. This day was the turning point in the war. In Polish history this victory is called "the Miracle at the Vistula"

<https://www.churchmilitant.com/news/article/miracle-on-the-vistula>

During the Nazi invasion and subsequent occupation, people came only secretly to Czestochowa because Hitler prohibited the pilgrimages. The chapel was damaged during World War II but was later repaired and in 1945 half a million pilgrims came to express their gratitude for liberation from Nazism. On September 8, 1946, 1,500,000 persons participated at the National Shrine in the rededication of the entire nation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In 1947 an even greater crowd of faithful gathered to implore the aid of the Holy Virgin against a new danger: the increasingly violent Communist penetration. Although the Communists, with the help of the Russian army, overpowered Poland through force, violence and deceit, as they did Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and the other Central East European countries, they could not overcome the spiritual resistance of the people. Old and young still cling to their faith and rely in absolute devotion on the ultimate help and intercession of the Virgin. The Bolsheviks are fully aware of this inner strength and resistance of the people, and the shrine of Czestochowa, like many another shrine of Our Lady in Central and Eastern Europe, has remained unharmed up to the present, although pilgrimages to it are for the most part prohibited.

History of St. Mary of Czestochowa Church

Wright County – Franklin Township Rural, Delano, Minnesota

Compiled by Peter and Helen Czech - Historians



The centennial celebration of a parish is the traditional time for parishioners to celebrate with pride and joy, to review the past 100 years of the history and the origin of their parish.

The first settler was Even Commer who purchased the land, which included 80 acres from the United States Government in 1860. In 1874 the 80 acres farm was purchased from Commer by Nicholaus and Rosalia Schwartz. Many Polish families had already settled around, and many more families emigrated from Poland, which was under German rule, this area became a

Polish settlement. They named it Czestochowa after the area in their native homeland. A general store with a dance hall, and a creamery were built. The creamery was named Whipple, by its owner. None of this exists today. Many descendents of these pioneer families reside on the original family farms here and around the area and are members of the parish.

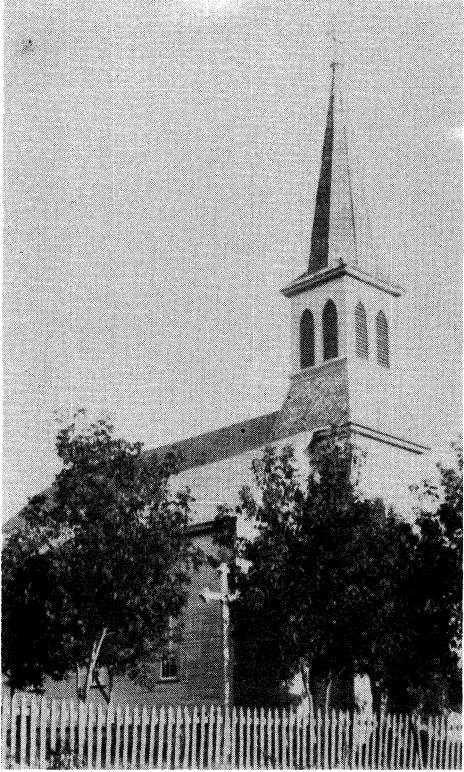
In 1884, fifty Polish families, united in a spirit of separation, in the congregation of St. Peter's Church, in Delano, wished to build a church of their own. The land, two acres, was donated for \$1.00 by Nicholaus and Rosalia Schwartz on the south side of the road for the church building and cemetery. John & Johanna Nalewaja donated two acres for \$1.00 on the north side of the road for a school in the future plans, which has never materialized but the land was deeded to Right Reverend Thomas L. Grace, Bishop of St. Paul, on June 12, 1884.

Under the supervision of Father J.B. Wenning, they built their first national church, the Church of St. Mary of Czestochowa, at a cost of \$3,000.00. It was a white frame building. Much of the work was done by the parishioners themselves who donated their time and effort to the construction. A huge 6 foot wooden cross of our crucified Lord stood outside in front and was adored by many before entering the church. Also outside on each of the four corners of the church land, small white chapels, complete with altar and tabernacle were erected. These chapels were used each year on the feast of Corpus Christi. Led by the cross, followed by altar boys and little girls dressed in white and



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carrying flowers the Blessed Sacrament was carried in procession to each chapel. The gospel was read, the Blessed Sacrament incensed and adored, then the procession continued to the next chapel as the congregation sang hymns. The procession ended in the church, and the Blessed Sacrament was again reposed in the tabernacle on the main altar. The feast of Corpus Christi was celebrated each year until vandals, thinking them to be outhouses, tipped them over on Halloween night, October 31, 1944. The chapels were given back to the families that donated them – Kusha, Czech, Nalewaja, & Motzko; two are still in existence today.



When St. Mary of Czestochowa was built the Most Reverend John Ireland was the first Archbishop of St. Paul. The first funeral in the church was in 1884, of Teresa Lyrek, wife of Sabastian Lyrek, who emigrated from Poland and settled in the Czestochowa settlement in 1881. The first wedding held in the church was also in 1884, of Eva Fautsch and Joseph Lyrek, son of Sabastian and Teresa Lyrek.

St. Mary remained a mission church, attached to St. Peter's Parish until the Polish people built their own St. Joseph's Church in Delano in 1904. Then it became a mission church attached to St. Joseph. At the time St. Mary's Church was built in 1884, transportation for the Pastor from Delano parish to the mission church was provided by the parishioners. There were no cars in those days. Members of the mission church volunteered to bring and return the Pastor back to Delano. It was by horse and buggy in the summer, or in the winter the driver and Pastor bundled themselves in sheepskin or fur coats and blankets and rode in either a horse drawn cutter or bobsled to church. The horses were put into a neighbor's barn until the trip to return home. A pot of hot coffee was ready in the sacristy on the pot belly stove, which also provided the heat. In those days winters were severely cold and huge snow banks were 3 to 6 feet high. The roads were only one track paths for the horses. Several times, the cutter upset, when meeting another driver going in the other direction. It would be set up again, everyone bundled in and went on their way. No one was ever injured. About 1919, some families purchased their first automobile, known as a touring car. These cars were entirely open except for side curtains which could be used in inclement weather. When not in use the side curtains which invariably seemed to be broken, were stored under the back seat. There were no such things as heaters, windshield wipers or anti-freeze. In the summer the roads were better except if the spring or summer was very wet, then there was mud and ruts, some a foot deep. The roads were just trails through the woods around the swamp and hills.

Masses were held only two Sundays a month. On holydays, mass was said on the day after the holy day. If anyone requested a mass during the week, they were responsible for transporting the priest. This arrangement ended when Father Yany of St. Joseph's Church, purchased his own automobile.

On June 19, 1913 tragedy struck. During a violent thunderstorm, lightning struck the steeple of the white frame church and it completely burned to the ground. Everything was lost.



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Father Zdechlik, who served this parish from St. Joseph's Church, and the parishioners vowed to build a new church. The beautiful building was designed by Victor Cordelia, a Polish architect from Minneapolis. It was to be a brick structure with a full basement. It was to seat 250 people. Two Polish men, Cebulla a brick layer and Soshink, a carpenter, both from Delano, were the contractors. Again all, parishioners worked endlessly to excavate the ground for the basement. This was all done by horse drawn wheel scrapers. The foundation was poured. Wooden forms were made for the basement walls which were made of cement. The bricks were purchased and hauled in by horse and wagon, from a brick factory located at Lake Mary in Mcleod County. During the building of the church, masses were held at the Nalewaja grocery store hall, across the road.

The cornerstone was blessed and laid on June 15, 1914. The first mass and dedication of the church were done by Bishop J. J. Lawler of St. Paul, on January 17, 1915. The Church was built at a cost of \$18,000.00. Some parishioners donated money for the beautiful stained glass windows, and all others donated money for the building itself. The main altar is a privileged altar from the confraternity rosary



charter, and two side altars are made of hardwood with beautiful carvings. The communion railings matched the altars and had marble tops. At the center base of the main altar is a sculpture of the Last Supper. It is tinted in beautiful wood tone colors.

The new church was heated by a wood furnace.

Each year, in the fall, one or two cords of hardwood were purchased, a saw rig engaged, and volunteer men from the parish sawed the wood into blocks, stacked it in the basement, ready for heating. The furnace fire had to be started the night before to have the church warm enough for services the next day. One of the trustees was also the janitor. The church was wired for electricity in 1940 and an oil furnace installed in 1948.

During the season of Lent, on Friday mornings, the Way of the Cross was led by Valentine Czech Sr. or John Nalewaja, as the pastor from Delano was not able to come. This continued until Father Yany came to St. Joseph's in Delano. Also, some men and women of the parish formed a group that recited the rosary before mass on Sundays and at the wake of deceased members. They had a treasurer and dues were 25¢ a year, money was used for masses for the sick and deceased. Low mass stipends were 50¢ at that time.

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Rev. Andrew Handzel became our first resident pastor in 1940. He resided in the St. Joseph Church Rectory with Father Yany. He came to St. Mary's everyday to say mass. It was at this time that the use of the Polish language ceased. Many of our younger people did not understand the language or had married into other nationalities and still are all welcome to become members of the church. Father Handzel helped the women and young ladies organize the Rosary Society in October 1940. It consisted of 3 groups of 15 ladies each. The first officers were: President-Miss Mary Gabrelcik, Vice President;- Mrs. Ethel Matter, Treasurer- Mrs. Peter Gabrelcik, Secretary-Mrs. Peter Czech. The society was very active, putting on the famous booya lunches, polish sausage suppers, card parties and now craft and bake sales. The dues were 10¢ a month. This money was used for upkeep of the altar linens and candles, etc. Also it was used for mass offerings for the sick and deceased masses on Holydays of the Blessed Virgin and other church necessities. The Rosary Society name existed until April 1983 when it was changed to St. Mary's Guild of Christian Women to include all women of the parish, catholic or non-catholic. It is also affiliated with the Northwest Deanery and Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women. The first officers are President-Kay Gabrelcik, Vice-President- Bernita Cebulla and Secretary-Treasurer-Karen Otto.

Father Handzel also organized the Men's Club. Boy's Youth Club and Girl's Club, but due to lack of enthusiasm they fizzled out. This also was the time that St. Mary's Church became famous for its chicken and ham dinners. People came from far and near to enjoy the food, especially the home baked pies, cakes and delicacy of the Polish people, the "Poppy Kuchen."



Father Handzel left St. Mary's Parish in 1942 to become pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Delano. In 1942, Father Andrew Wojciak became our second pastor. He also resided in the St. Joseph's Rectory. In the late summer of 1946 the parishioners of St. Mary decided to build a home for their pastor. The site selected, on the south side of the church with convenient access to the sacristy and basement of the church, was too narrow. Peter and Helen Czech donated one-fourth acre of land from their farm to make enough room for the house. Plans were made and the work began.

The exterior was to be brick to match the church. The contractor was Laurence Stoke of Delano. In the fall of 1947, the house was blessed, an open house and luncheon held and Father Wojciak moved in. In August 1948, the congregation was deeply saddened when Father Wojciak announced that he was being transferred to Wilno, Minnesota, after being our pastor for 6 years.

Father Francis J. Poplawski came from Wilno, Minnesota in August 1948 to be our third pastor. Soon after his arrival he removed the picture of St. Mary of Czestochowa that adorned the main altar since

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1914, when the church was built. On the back of the picture he had his version and coloring of the same picture, painted by an artist from Taunton, Minnesota. That painting was eventually taken down and was replaced by the original which is the painting we see today. In 1970 his parishioners honored him on his Golden Jubilee of his priesthood with an open house, reception and dinner at St. Joseph Hall in Delano. He was our beloved pastor for 23 years. In 1971 he retired and entered the St. Joseph Home for the aged and resided there until his death on January 8, 1975 at the age of 90 years. He was laid to rest at the Holy Sepulcher Cemetery in Cudahy, Wisconsin.

In the interlude of one year, priests from Kings House in Buffalo and the archdiocese of St. Paul served our parish. To them we are eternally grateful.

In August 1972, Father Remi Payant came from Marystown, Minnesota to become our fourth pastor. He was a licensed pilot and amateur astronomer, a science devotee and handyman. With the help of his parishioners he extensively renovated the parish facilities. He was the first pastor to publish a parish bulletin for every Sunday. Most parishioners received aerial photos of their homes, which he took while flying over the area. On Sunday May 21, 1978 the parishioners honored him on his 40th anniversary of his priesthood with a reception and luncheon. He was our pastor for nearly 8 years, retiring on June 15, 1980. He resides at the Leo C. Byrne Residence for priests at 2190 Summit Avenue, St. Paul, MN which is located on the St. Paul Seminary grounds.

We were greatly overjoyed to have Father Clement Zweber come from St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Osseo MN to be our fifth pastor, on June 15, 1980. How sad we were when Father Zweber announced he was leaving us on February 1981 to become pastor of St. Genevieve Church in Centerville, MN. He had been with us for only 8 months.

Again we were well served by visiting priests for 5 months from Immaculate Conception Church in Watertown, Kings House in Buffalo and from St. Paul.

In July 1981 Reverend Thomas Kobestein, O.P. from the Dominican Order, and a native of the Twin Cities, came as an administrator of the parish. He remained with us until June 13, 1982. He was assigned to St. Benedict Church in Avon, MN until September 10, 1982. After that he was to go overseas to study at Blackfriars, Oxford, England until June 30, 1983.

On June 15, 1982, we felt our prayers had been answered again as we welcomed Father Robert A. Vashro of Minneapolis to be our 7th pastor. He had been chaplain at the Veterans Administration Hospital for the past 10 years and is a retired Air Force Chaplain. Father Vashro spent most of his time trying to fix up the church and updating the heating system. He wanted the people of St. Mary's to be especially proud of their beautiful historical church. He completely redecorated and refurbished the rectory making St. Mary's one of the choice parishes of the diocese. Father Vashro enrolled the parish in the 100% Catholic Bulletin plan under which each family receives in his or her home a copy of the Diocesan newspaper each week. During Father Vashro's first year as pastor the relatives of Victoria and Arnold Schmidt donated to the church a beautiful new solid oak altar of sacrifice which is the focus of attention in the sanctuary.

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The parish also has an ADVISORY COUNCIL of 10 men who advise the Pastor on decisions that apply to the church. In the year of 1982 Mrs. Genevieve Lyrek gave the church a beautiful crucifix which now adorns the right side of the sanctuary.

Soon after Father Vashro's arrival, he organized the St. Mary's Men's Club. President-Louis Bury, Vice President-Ed Sifferle, Secretary-Treasurer-Jim Herzog. On Sunday, July 24, 1983, the clubs first year in existence, they put on a huge event, called a Hog Roast, which was very successful and profitable. Plans are being made for this to be an annual affair.

This summer of 1983, under the watchful supervision of Father Vashro, the inside of the church proper, the sanctuary and Stations of the Cross have been beautifully redecorated. A new Baldwin Studio organ was purchased and dedicated for the choir loft. The organ was a lovely gift from Paul and Christine Huncha who considered themselves long-time parishioners of St. Mary's and are at the present time buried in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Since this year of 1984 is the year of our Centennial, plans are being made to observe this most joyous event. On June 17, 1984, Archbishop John A. Roach will be the main celebrant that day at the 10 o'clock concelebrated mass. Immediately following the mass, a catered dinner for the guests and all parishioners will be served at Handzel Hall at St Joseph Church in Delano. Beginning at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, a reception will be held in the St Mary Church Hall. Father Vashro and all parishioners are cordially inviting all former Pastors who have served our parish with such great love and care to be our guests and share with us this most joyous and eventful day.

Men who served or are serving the parish as trustees since it became a parish with its own resident Pastors: Frank Gallus, Peter Koziol, Peter Czech Sr., John Schmidt, Walter Motzko, Walter Swartzter, Vernon Duske.

The above history was compiled by Peter and Helen Czech. References: Delano Eagle, Catholic Bulletin, Delano Centennial Book, Parish Bulletins, and History of Archdiocesan Churches.

1991 - St Mary of Czestochowa begins to share a pastor with St. Boniface in St. Bonifaciuos.

1997 - The 8:00PM Saturday mass returns to the parish. A new confessional is constructed.

2002 – A new parking lot is paved on the parish property on the north side of 95th street.

2005 – The parish officially begins to employ people in part-time positions: a secretary-bookkeeper, a maintenance/grounds man, and the following year a music director.

May 28, 2005 – Daniel Bodine, native son of the Church of St. Mary, is ordained to the priesthood at the Cathedral of St. Paul. The following day he offers his first Mass among family and friends at the Church of St. Mary of Czestochowa.

2006 – After a contest to rename the July parish festival, the event becomes know as the Annual Country Festival. A monument to the unborn is placed in the parish cemetery in memory of babies who have died by abortion.