

# The Fiedorczyk Lecture

in Polish American Studies



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**THE FIEDORCZYK LECTURE  
IN  
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1999**

*"Immigrant Faith, American Future:  
Poles and Religion before World War II"*

William J. Galush



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## The Fiedorczyk Lecture in Polish American Studies

The immigrant parishes are central to the history of the Polish Diaspora in America, as are the clergy who ministered to the immigrants and their children. In Connecticut, where the first Polish parish, St. Stanislaus in Meriden, was erected in 1891, over 350 priests, both diocesan and religious, have served the state's Polish Catholics. Thirteen were elevated to the rank of domestic prelate, ten of whom were the second-generation children of the original immigrants. The second-generation monsignori were uniquely talented, highly educated, and skilled orators. Had they opted for secular careers, they would have succeeded as professionals, educators, businessmen and entrepreneurs, or as politicians. However, they elected to serve their communities by answering a call to the priesthood. As second-generation immigrant children, they bridged the transition of the immigrant communities into ethnic American enclaves. As witnesses, they recognized the importance of chronicling the history of this transformation. A triumvirate of Polish monsignori — Alphonse J. V. Fiedorczyk, John Paul Wodarski, and Louis B. Blecharczyk — not only shaped the evolution of second and third generation Polish Americans, but were also instrumental in encouraging the research about and the preservation of Connecticut's Polish history.

Alphonse Fiedorczyk, the son of Polish immigrants, was born in New Britain, Connecticut, on September 10, 1910. He attended Sacred Heart School in his native parish and later graduated from St. Mary's College at Orchard Lake, Michigan. He then studied at St. Bernard Seminary in Rochester, New York, and at the Seminaire de St. Briec in France, which he completed in 1935, the year of his ordination to the priesthood. Father Fiedorczyk returned to his home parish to serve as a curate for eight years. In 1943, he joined the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps. Lt. Fiedorczyk served as a chaplain with the 79th Infantry Division in Europe and was decorated with the following honors: The Legion of Merit, The Bronze Star, the French Croix de Guerre with Fouragere, and the World War II Victory Medal. He also served in Korea and two postwar tours in Germany. After 26 years of military service, he retired with the rank of Brigadier General. Msgr. Fiedorczyk returned to Connecticut to the Bridgeport Diocese, where he was subsequently assigned to Holy Name Parish in Stamford. He served fourteen years as pastor and was a critical figure in the revival of the Parish's Polish profile.

First and foremost a priest, Msgr. Fiedorczyk always kept in the forefront during his 52 years of service the injunction "to preach and to offer sacrifice." He viewed service to the Polish community as an integral part of his ministry and was deeply concerned with the preservation and promotion of the history of the Polish community in America. He endorsed the proposal of his friend, Msgr. John P. Wodarski, and encouraged the Association of Polish Priests of Connecticut to commission *Immigrant Pastor* by Prof. Daniel Buczek, an important biography of the pioneering Msgr. Lucyan Bójnowski of New Britain. Msgr. Fiedorczyk was also a long-time member of the Polish American Historical Association. He was active in Polish affairs at Sacred Heart University in Bridgeport and at Central Connecticut State University. He donated his papers and memoirs to the Connecticut Polish American Archives at CCSU.

In 1987 the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Alphonse J. V. Fiedorczyk endowed the Polish Studies Program at Central Connecticut State University with an annual Lecture in Polish American Studies in memory of the Vincent Fiedorczyk Family. After a long illness, Msgr. Fiedorczyk passed away on November 16, 1987.

The publication of the *Fiedorczyk Lecture* for the permanent record is made possible with funds from the Stanislaw and Anna (Kobierska) Wodarski Endowment in the CCSU Foundation, Inc. The Endowment was established by Msgr. John P. Wodarski to help underwrite the publication of the *Fiedorczyk Lecture*. Wodarski was born in 1905 in Salem, Massachusetts. His family moved to Hartford in 1911. Wodarski studied for the priesthood at St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, at the Polish Seminary of Ss. Cyril and Methodius at Orchard Lake, Michigan, and at the University of Fribourg, where he was ordained on July 12, 1931. During World War II he served as a chaplain in the 20th Armored Division and was awarded the Bronze Star for heroism on the field of battle. Upon returning to Connecticut, he became Director of the Hartford Diocese Catholic Youth Organization and later headed the Diocesan Office for Communication. From 1961 until his retirement in 1992 he was pastor of Holy Cross Parish in New Britain.

Active in the organization and promotion of the religious, cultural, and educational life of Connecticut's Polish community, he was acknowledged as "the pastor of the Poles." He was involved in Connecticut's commemoration of the Millennium, in

the remembrance of Polish Gentile survivors of the Holocaust, and in the efforts to establish a Polish Studies Program at then Central Connecticut State College. Wodarski, member emeritus of the University's Polish Studies Advisory Committee, shared with his close friend Msgr. Fiedorczyk a commitment to the preservation of the history of America's Polish Community. He supported the writing of professional histories of Connecticut's Polish parishes and the biography of Msgr. Bójnowski. A member of the Polish American Historical Association, Wodarski helped underwrite the translation and publication of Rev. Waclaw Kruszka's classic *A History of the Poles in America to 1908*. Wodarski has donated numerous books to the Polish Heritage Collection at the CCSU Library and was instrumental in arranging for the donation of the papers of the Association of Polish Priests in Connecticut to the University's Polish American Archive.

The third member of this Polish triumvirate, Msgr. Louis B. Blecharczyk, was a close friend of Fiedorczyk and Wodarski. Born in Akron, Ohio, in 1908, and raised in Connecticut, he was ordained at the University of Fribourg on February 7, 1935. He served in various Polish parishes before being appointed pastor of St. Joseph's in Norwich, where he served until his retirement in 1980. Msgr. Blecharczyk was a past president of the Association of Polish Priests of Connecticut and chairman of Connecticut's religious observance of the Millennium of Poland's Christianization. When Karol Cardinal Wojtyła of Cracow visited Connecticut in 1969, Msgr. Blecharczyk, on behalf of Connecticut Polonia, greeted the future Pope. Among the honors that Msgr. Blecharczyk received were the order of *Polonia Restituta* from the Polish Government-in-Exile (1969), the Gold Medal of the Diocese of Norwich (1975), the St. George Medal in recognition for his service to Catholic youth through the Boy Scouts of America (1975), and the Haller Swords Medal (1977) from the Polish Army Veterans, Post 132 of Norwich. Msgr. Blecharczyk died on September 21, 1992.

Msgr. Blecharczyk was an eloquent bilingual preacher much in demand throughout his priestly career, which spanned 57 years. He loved preaching the Gospel and the contributions of the Polish Church to the welfare of its citizens, especially during the years when Poland was partitioned. Msgr. Blecharczyk organized outstanding celebrations commemorating the Polish Constitution of May 3, 1791, and was, in the words of his friend Msgr. Wodarski, "never known to pass up an invitation to speak on Polish faith and patriotism."

Fiedorczyk, Wodarski, and Bleharczyk, their fellow monsignori — Stanisław Musiel, Lucjan Bójnowski, Jan L. Ceppa, Władysław Nowakowski, Franciszek Władasz, George Bartlewski, Henry Dziadosz, Tadeusz Malinowski, Alfred Sienkiewicz, and Daniel Plocharczyk — and all the religious of every denomination who served the immigrants from the lands of the former Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, are a unique part of the history of the Polish diaspora in Connecticut and in America.

William J. Galush, Associate Professor of History at Loyola University of Chicago, presented the 1999 Fiedorczyk Lecture. Professor Galush received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota for his dissertation on "Forming Polonia: A Study of Four Polish-American Communities, 1890 — 1940." He is a specialist in American immigration and church history. His articles have appeared in journals such as *Ethnicity*, *Catholic Historical Review*, *Polish American Studies*, and *Przegląd Polonijny*, and in the following collections: *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America* (1977), *Polish Americans and Their History: Community, Culture, and Politics* (1996), and in *Ethnicity, Culture, City* (1998). Professor Galush's monograph, *For More than Bread: Community and Identity in Four Polish American Settlements, 1880 — 1940* will be published shortly. Professor Galush is the recipient of the 1990 Swastek Prize for the best article in *Polish American Studies*, and he is a former president of the Polish American Historical Association.

The 1999 Fiedorczyk Lecture was a special occasion for Central Connecticut State University. Prior to the Fiedorczyk Lecture, the University welcomed Monsignor John P. Wodarski into the University family in a very special way, conferring upon him an honorary doctorate of human letters. The 1999 Fiedorczyk Lecture is in honor of Monsignor Wodarski. In disseminating this lecture, we hope, as have Monsignors Fiedorczyk, Wodarski, and Bleharczyk, to promote the further study and preservation of the Polish community in America.

*Stanislaus A. Blejwas*  
*CSU University Professor of History*  
*Holder of the Endowed Chair in Polish*  
*and Polish American Studies*  
*Central Connecticut State University*

Central Connecticut State University  
Honorary Degree Citation  
for

Right Reverend Monsignor John P. Wodarski

*Service to others is the hallmark of a civil society, the foundation of a democratic culture, and the fullest expression of the humanity that our Creator endowed us. You, John Paul Wodarski, the son of immigrant parents from Poland, entered the priesthood in 1931 because "the opportunity for service appealed to something inside of me," and for sixty years you provided God's flock "a shepherd's care."*

*While a young curate during the Depression, you organized discussion clubs and plunged into the youth work that became a hallmark of your career. You founded St. Mary's Summer Camp in Woodstock and were a Boy Scout chaplain. World War II deepened your pastoral ministry. As a chaplain with the 20th Armored Division, you were awarded the Bronze Star for heroism in aiding men under enemy fire. In April 1945, you, Captain Wodarski, encountered the Holocaust when the American Army liberated the infamous Dachau concentration camp. Among the first in the camp, you met the survivors of more than 2,000 imprisoned Polish priests. You were "awed" that their first request was for breviaries, which their Nazi captors had denied them. When you asked how the atrocities of a Dachau could happen a priest prisoner told you: "You turn your back on God and you revert to animal status." You bore witness to "man's inhumanity to man" and shared your encounter with the Holocaust with the Yale Holocaust Oral History Project and encouraged an oral history project at Central with Polish survivors.*

*You resumed your work with young people, accepting diocesan responsibility for the Catholic Youth Organization, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts, and for vocations. In 1962, you chaired a conference on children and youth for Governor John Dempsey. From 1947 to 1968 you served on the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Reformatory in Cheshire and worked also with retarded children. Recognizing the role of the modern media, you organized and led the Diocesan Office of Communications. You handled the work of nine administrators, and in 1957 Pius XII elevated you to the rank of Domestic Prelate.*



*1961 was the thirtieth anniversary of your priesthood, but only half-time. You returned to parish work as pastor of Holy Cross Church, where you served until "early" retirement in 1992. Responding to the ecumenical winds of the Second Vatican Council, you served as Director of the New Britain Area Conference of Churches. You also implemented the post-counciliar changes that democratized parish governance.*

*Service to the Polish community was a special dimension of your priestly ministry. You participated in every major community commemoration, and hosted in New Britain a young Polish cardinal, Kraków's Karol Wojtyła. You hold education in reverence and take special pride in the numerous college graduates from Holy Cross Parish. You also encouraged students to visit Poland and strengthened community pride in its Polish heritage.*

*A very special relationship exists between Central Connecticut State University and Monsignor John Paul Wodarski. For a quarter-of-a-century you served with distinction on our University's Polish Studies Advisory Committee. Gifted with intellectual curiosity, a zest for argument and the exchange of opinions, and with a love for your community, Monsignor, you championed scholarly research on the Polish community in America. You assisted in the creation of the Annual Fiedorczyk Lecture in Polish American Studies, and established the Stanisław and Anna (Kobierska) Wodarski Endowment for the publication and dissemination of the Fiedorczyk Lectures. You are justly revered as "The Pastor of the Poles."*

*For you life-time of service to others — to young people and students, to American soldiers and the victims of the Holocaust, to Connecticut's Polish American community, and to higher education and to Central Connecticut State University, we are proud to welcome "The Pastor of the Poles" to our University Family and to present you for the Degree of Doctor of Human Letters, honoris causa, Right Reverend Monsignor John P. Wodarski.*

at

*New Britain, Connecticut*

*April 29, 1999*

**Immigrant Faith, American Future:  
Poles and Religion before World War II**

Eleventh Annual  
Fiedorczyk Lecture in Polish American Studies  
Central Connecticut State University  
April 29, 1999

William J. Galush  
Loyola University  
Chicago, Illinois

In 1890 Father Anthony Francis Kolaszewski, pastor of Cleveland's St. Stanislaus, described his activities to his bishop: "I am [the parishioners'] advisor, their contractor, their friend, their brother and very often their judge. With everything they come to me."<sup>1</sup> A few years later another cleric gave a contrasting perspective:

Many times we hear and read that in Polish [American] parishes the people quarrel with the priest. ... Since in America the present generation pays for the church and the priest, some of them think that they have acquired the right to rule the priest and to determine his competencies.<sup>2</sup>

The two quotations characterize much of the atmosphere of immigrant Polish Catholicism. In the United States the priest took on new responsibilities for a flock composed largely of ill-educated but pious peasants. His activism and direction was usually welcomed since newcomers felt the need for advice and guidance from a trusted figure in a strange land. Yet many laypersons found in *wolna ziemia Waszingtona* ("the free land of Washington") the courage to speak where in the homeland they had been silent. Contention was not on theology but polity. Poles were orthodox in belief, but like other Catholic immigrants before them some developed a vision of church government different from that of American Catholicism.<sup>3</sup>

Contests over polity do not define Polish American religious expression, and creation and support was more common than argument and division. I will speak tonight on several broad topics within the Polish American religious experience. My remarks will focus on the central institution of Polonian religion, the parish.

Religion in America was different in important aspects from its expression in the old country. In the homeland the church had stood in the village from time immemorial, passed from generation to generation as the center of the holy. Shrines, a cemetery

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Jean Jaglewski, ed., *A People One Hundred Years* (Cambridge, MD: Western Publishing Company, 1973), 187.

<sup>2</sup> *Kuryer Polski*, June 16, 1894, quoting from *Katolik*.

<sup>3</sup> On trusteeism see Patrick Carey, *Prelates, Priests and People: Ecclesiastical Democracy and the Tensions of Trusteeism* (Notre Dame Press, 1987), epilog; contrasting visions of the church appear in Anthony Kuzniewski, SJ, *Faith and Fatherland: The Polish Church War in Wisconsin, 1896-1918* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980).

and the stately progress of the liturgical year gave a comforting sense of stability. Graced with the patina of age, the church was used by the people but not under their control. The patron, usually a well-off local noble, stood first as a donor and had a voice in selecting the pastor. The state used its taxing power to make sure that the parish had sufficient income, so that morality and order in society might be preserved.

When Polish immigrants came to America, not only was the setting novel but the familiar congregations were absent. They soon learned that there were Catholic churches in the new land, and as pious and respectable people they attended those nearby. Many sought out the German parishes which used the tongue semi-familiar to Poles from the Austrian and German partitions. But as a published letter plaintively observed, "we felt like strangers".<sup>4</sup> Yearning for the familiarity of their language and culture, and realizing that in America they had to provide initiative and monetary support, devout men came together. They elected parish committees that helped found hundreds of churches across the nation.<sup>5</sup> A report in the Minnesota *Wiarus* on the foundation of Minneapolis' Holy Cross showed both the process and pride:

You might say that we are just a handful; yet in the year 1885 with the assistance and guidance of our guardian, the Reverend Father Dominic Majer of St. Paul, we made a step forward and organized our first parish committee and voted for officers. Then we made a collection among ourselves which brought quite a sum into our treasury. On the advice of Father Majer, our officers sought and found three lots in a fine location and purchased them. Through the planning and leadership of our committee,<sup>6</sup> the building of the new Polish church was begun....

These were national parishes, limited in membership to Poles, and established to perpetuate a Polish form of Catholicism in the United States.

New churches were modest, for the newcomers had small worldly wealth. Yet they came in increasing numbers, almost three million by 1914. Poles were distinguished by their generosity,

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<sup>4</sup> *Wiarus*, October 14, 1886.

<sup>5</sup> By 1920, at the effective end of the *stara imigracja*, there were over 700 Polish Roman Catholic parishes in the United States. James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 39.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Edward A. Chmielewski, "A History of Holy Cross Parish, Minneapolis, Minnesota 1886-1914" (Unpublished M.A. thesis: St. Paul Seminary, 1960), 5.

and collectively their donations were substantial. Many times pioneer parishioners contributed their labor to subsidize the cost of construction. As more arrived the original little church was replaced by a bigger, more elaborate edifice. Often there was a third, usually built before the great Depression of the 1930s, richer in decoration and even larger in size. The final structures were frequently in a Romanesque or Baroque style, with arcing barrel vaults and lovely stained glass windows. Towering over the neighborhood, they were the visible center of the community and still beautify our cities today.

Congregations provided comforting reminders of the homeland. Beloved rituals such as the Mass of the Shepherds at midnight on Christmas Eve, the *Gorzkie żale* ("bitter lamentations") of Lent, the majestic Easter Mass and *świeconka* (blessing of food) offered familiarity amidst strangeness. Hymns and sermons were in Polish and the harsh world of mills and mines could be forgotten for an all too brief time through the ancient drama of common worship.<sup>7</sup>

While there was a strong effort to retain Polish religious practices, there were pressures for innovation from American bishops. A favored devotion in late nineteenth century America was Forty Hours, which often had a specific line on the annual parish report so that the diocese might know that it was part of the liturgical year. Since Forty Hours was known at home, it easily became a fixture of Polonian worship here.<sup>8</sup> Less quickly accepted was frequent reception of Holy Communion, especially promoted by Pope Pius X (1903-1914). The tradition of annual reception was not soon displaced, and frequent Communion more characterized the second generation.

The atmosphere of worship is difficult to establish, but suggestive hints of change exist. In Minneapolis Holy Cross parish committee minutes recorded censure of one Francis Zbowski for selling raffle tickets at Mass. On another occasion the committee branded as an "infamy" smoking during the service.<sup>9</sup> An em-

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<sup>7</sup> Eugene Obidinski and Helen Stankiewicz Zand, *Polish Folkways in America: Community and Family* (Boston: University Press of America, 1987), 62-72.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Taves, *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth Century America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 30-31; Bolesław Kumor, *Historia kościoła. Czasy najnowsze 1815-1914* (Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 1991), 404.

<sup>9</sup> William J. Galush, "Forming Polonia: A Study of Four Polish-American Communities, 1890-1940," (Unpublished PH.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1975), 158.

phasis on decorum, important as an attribute of respectability in a non-Polish society, may have displaced a more casual atmosphere in worship. This would be consistent with the prewar denunciations in the ethnic press of long and loud wedding parties, which were seen by editors as violations of propriety and a stain on the reputation of Poles.

The church was usually accompanied by a school. Poles came mainly after 1884, the year the American hierarchy committed Catholics in the United States to the goal of each parish having an educational institution.<sup>10</sup> While peasant immigrants dreamed of returning to the old country, pockets filled with dollars to buy or enlarge landholdings, the vision of temporary residence faded for most. Nothing symbolized their commitment to America more than the parish school. Here the coming generations would be instructed to be good Polish Catholics and good Americans.

This dualism meant that schools were emblems of acculturation as well as commitment. From the start instruction was bilingual. As a widely-traveled Jesuit missionary put it, "In profitable careers it is unthinkable not to know English."<sup>11</sup> Both the immigrant masses and their leaders perceived the need to learn the language of the new country. As private institutions supported by fees, the parochial schools avoided the politicization of bilingualism that afflicts our public education system today. Yet they took careful account of public instruction. As pioneer educator Father Józef Dąbrowski noted, "We must...be on par with the public schools, maintaining a high level since the Protestants strive for a thorough education."<sup>12</sup> His reference to "Protestants" captured the common Catholic perception of public education, and Polish eagerness to establish their own centers for instruction was applauded by contemporary bishops. Their applause was more muted in regard to the ethnic dimension of Polonian schooling, but before World War I there was little diocesan oversight of parochial education. Schools required instructors. Almost invariably those begun before 1900 drew upon a traditional source: the organist-teacher. These men were losing their pedagogical role in the homeland, displaced by the graduates of the new teacher training academies. But every

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<sup>10</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *American Catholic Experience: A History from the Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985) 271-272.

<sup>11</sup> *Nasze Wiadomości*, September, 1912, p. 551.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Sister Mary Janice Ziolkowski, CSSF, *The Felician Sisters of Livonia, Michigan: First Province in America* (Detroit: Harlo Press, 1984), 52.

parish here wanted an organist, and for many teaching was a means to enlarge their modest salaries. Organists joined the flow of immigration, but their presence in Polonian schools was fleeting.

In 1874 Father Dąbrowski invited the Congregation of St. Felix to staff schools in the Detroit area. The Felicians were the first of a wave of nuns from the old country, with Benedictines, Franciscans, Resurrectionists and others coming in large numbers before World War I. Nuns offered several advantages to struggling congregations. Communities could provide additional personnel, crucial in an era when classes often exceeded 70 pupils, and they worked cheap.<sup>13</sup> But more important was their unique status, as described in a Utica Polish newspaper in 1911:

The Catholic religion, ...that gift of God, ...is inculcated in our Polish school by persons who know it best because more than others they live according to the evangelical teachings in all their impeccable beauty.<sup>14</sup>

In an urban environment seen as subversive of proper behavior, nuns stood for morality and respectability. Fortunately, not only were their numbers increasing rapidly at home, but young American-born women soon answered the call and flocked to the communities. More than priests, nuns shaped the character of young Polish Americans.<sup>15</sup>

A look at the curriculum shows their ambition. The biggest community, the Felicians, published a teacher's guide in 1894, the *Kurs nauk dla szkół parafialnych* ("Curriculum for Parochial Schools"). The very term "parochial" indicated novelty, since while some nuns in the old country taught in private institutions these usually catered to the upper classes. but the sisters quickly adapted to instructing the offspring of workers and undertook in America a teaching mission almost exclusively in the years before World War I. Not until they had been in the United States for some time did most communities widen their fields of service.

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<sup>13</sup> Nuns customarily received about \$250 a year before 1914, compared to \$60-70 a month for a lay teacher. E. g., Sr. Josephine Peplinski, SSJ-TOSF, *A Fitting Response: The History of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis. Part II: The Growth, 1902-1962* (South Bend, IN, 1992), 42; Józef Miąso, *The History of the Education of Polish Immigrants in the United States* (Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1977), 110.

<sup>14</sup> *Ślowo Polskie*, October 5, 1911.

<sup>15</sup> Sister Mary Janice Ziolkowski, CSSF, *The Felician Sisters of Livonia, Michigan: First Province in America* (Detroit: Harlo Press, 1984), Appendices 1-3; Sister M. DeChantal, CSFN, *Out of Nazareth: A Centenary of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth in the Service of the Church* (New York: Exposition Press, 1974), 157-160, 171-173.

The Felician curriculum showed much sensitivity to the new environment. While religion, literature and Polish history were in the ancestral tongue, geography, arithmetic and U.S. history were in English and several other subjects in both, along with instruction in the respective grammars.<sup>16</sup> Polish texts were often from Austrian Poland, but soon Polonian publishers such as Władysław Dyniewicz of Chicago developed schoolbooks. The pre-1914 school day was typically split about equally between Polish and English. Children shaped by this curriculum ideally were bilingual and familiar with two cultures. They also received religious instruction daily, seen by parents and clergy alike as crucial to their proper upbringing.

This devotion to education affected the physical character of the parish. The imposing public schools of America, so much larger and elaborate than the village structures at home, were a stimulus to present a better face to the world. Like the houses of worship, parochial school buildings were successively enlarged or replaced with more modern and bigger edifices. They were in competition with the tax-supported public institutions, but through constant improvement and low fees — usually 50¢ a month before 1914 — they attracted a majority of the immigrants' children. Considering that a laborer made \$1-2 a day in this period, they were affordable even for the poor, and workers were as eager as the better-off to enroll their offspring.

Accompanying the church and school was a rectory and convent. Though frequently without an assistant in the prewar period, the pastor had a relatively commodious building to himself and his housekeeper. By contrast the nuns were given the opportunity to practice their vow of poverty, since often they lived in cramped apartments behind the school or in a house less imposing than the pastor's. Not until after World War I in many parishes did the sisters get a proper convent.

All of these buildings cost money to construct and more to keep up. Financing the parish was an ongoing necessity and sometimes a point of debate. By taking the initiative to get a church going, which included the election of a parish committee and collection of donations, laymen acquired the habit of democratic participation. While the bishop normally consented to the establish-

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<sup>16</sup> *Kurs nauk dla szkół parafialnych zostających pod kierownictwem zgr. siostr felicyanek* (n.p., 1894, 1913).



ment of a national parish and assigned a priest — invariably Polish — this placed the new parishioners in an authoritarian organization. The bishop insisted that the property be signed over to the diocese, which the committeemen, eager for a congregation, agreed to. But the new pastor usually found the parish committee still around, and subsequently such bodies tried to perpetuate themselves even if they lacked official status in American Catholic church government.<sup>17</sup>

Most of the time a pragmatic arrangement emerged. The pastor saw in the committeemen persons of good will, concerned for the success of the congregation, and he usually worked with them. In turn the committeemen seldom interfered in "spiritual" matters; what interested them were finances and in a large sense, providing a voice for the laity. The parish committee organized fund-raising in cooperation with the pastor, helped mobilize members for major projects and provided a useful link with the rest of the congregation. In turn pastors sometimes rose to their defense in the face of episcopal suspicions. For years Father Hipolyte Orłowski at St. John Cantius in Cleveland ignored Bishop Ignatius Horstmann's order to appoint committeemen instead of electing them, finally provoking an irate letter from the bishop which ended with "Why do the Poles always cause trouble in this regard?"<sup>18</sup> Despite the iron will and authoritarian inclinations of many immigrant pastors, a desire for harmony was strong in young parishes, and oversight by non-Polish bishops was not always welcome.

Churches were funded through several means. A useful model for financing existed before the parish: the fraternal insurance society. The first ethnic institution was established by laymen who combined to protect themselves through pooling dues in a democratically-structured mutual aid association. Often the society joined a federation like the Polish Roman Catholic Union or the Polish National Alliance. Societies were supported by assessments, usually 50¢ a month in independent lodges. It was easy for parish committeemen, themselves often officers in fraternal, to see

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<sup>17</sup> The epilog in Carey offers insightful observations on the post-1865 experience. Carey, *Priests, People and Prelates*.

<sup>18</sup> Bishop Ignatius Horstmann to Rev. Hipolyte Orłowski, January 24, 1903, St. John Cantius File, Archives of the Diocese of Cleveland.

regular fixed payments as an appropriate means to support the parish. And so it was; *lawki* (pew rents) formed the financial bedrock for most pre-1914 congregations. The fraternal analogy was not carried too far. Those too poor to pay their parish assessment were admitted, but such persons suffered in status since they did not seem to be pulling their weight. Only after World War I did the Sunday plate collection become a major source of income in most Polish churches.

The parish was founded by men but its most faithful participants were women. The first devotional body was usually a Rosary or Sacred Heart of Jesus Society. For female immigrants these were consoling reminders of the homeland, since in the old country villages pious associations were normally the only organizations of women. The huge parish of St. Stanislaus in Chicago, numbering almost 50,000 in 1899, had dozens of "roses" in its Rosary Society, with several thousand members.<sup>19</sup> Women came together for spiritual sustenance, but also they exchanged information and provided casual mutual aid, akin to the fraternalists but without the formal insurance structure. The pastor frequently appeared at meetings, an honored guest who led them in prayer and perhaps offered a homily. Men seldom had such groups, though a prayer might open a meeting of a mutual aid society.

Immigrant congregations were not always peaceful. Nothing so disturbed a parish as an incident of independentism. Criticism usually centered on the pastor, who might be denounced by discontented laypersons for dictatorial behavior, misuse of parish monies or immorality — often all three. An enlarged lay interest in democracy, occasional clerical misdeeds and too frequently a lack of charity sundered the peace and unity of dozens of churches. Dissent took organized form by the late 1890s. In 1897 in Scranton, Pennsylvania Father Francis Hodur assumed leadership of a secessionist movement from the parish where he had previously served. This was the beginning of the Polish National Catholic Church. The dissenters claimed to be more Polish and more democratic, denouncing loyalists as stooges of the Irish and slaves to Rome. The Roman Catholic response was equally heated, with

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<sup>19</sup> *Album pamiątkowe z okazji złotego jubileuszu parafii Św. Stanisława K.* (Chicago, IL, np., n.d.) no pagination; Joseph J. Parot, *Polish Catholics in Chicago, 1850-1920* DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981), 51.

dark and unenlightened masses, but they will return enlightened, filled with the spirit of nationalism. America is the school of our people, where they will imbibe a feeling of worth.<sup>22</sup>

The center for patriotic enlightenment was the parish. Priests in the United States stood steadfast in favor of national independence, though they also commonly felt that only a Roman Catholic was a true Pole. This put them in contention with secularist leaders who asserted anyone who declared his Polishness was a Pole, which might include non-believers, socialists and even Jews. If divisive, the debate at least forced the immigrants to think more about their identity and Poles in America developed a sense of nationality more quickly than who remained in the partitioned homeland.

The Roman Catholic definition became dominant by World War I. Given this, church halls were frequently sites for rallies. Here the pastor shared the podium with lay leaders, with religion blessing nationalism in the cause of Polish freedom. These were lengthy affairs, often exceeding twenty presentations, and carefully recounted in the local press by the *sekretarz obchodu* ("event secretary").<sup>23</sup> The rallies sought to include everyone. Priests and male leaders comprised most of the speakers, but women also gave addresses. Nuns coached school children in declamations while church and secular choirs sang hymns and national melodies. Rallies were celebrations of community as well as nationalism.

During World War I a Polish army began recruiting in the United States. The federal government cooperated and by war's end over 20,000 immigrants served under Polish colors in France.<sup>24</sup> Enlistments were usually promoted through the parish, and when groups of young men departed for training the pastor customarily celebrated a special Mass and preached on their duty to Poland. While most did not actually go off to war, immigrants and their mature offspring formed relief committees for the suffering homeland through their congregations. The Polish Central

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<sup>22</sup> *Przegląd Emigracyjny*, January 1, 1894.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., *Słońce*, May 5, 1899; also *Naród Polski*, February 18, 1914.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph T. Hapak, "Selective Service and Polish Army Recruitment During World War I," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10 (Summer 1991): 38-60.

Relief Committee, headquartered in Switzerland and led by master pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski, coordinated the effort with the support of the clergy. During World War I Paderewski toured the United States, speaking to enthusiastic crowds in parish halls and giving concerts to raise relief funds.

The end of the war in November 1918 was a double jubilation. Not only did Poles in America rejoice in the victory of their adopted country but they took heart in the emergence of an independent Poland. Despite continued fighting until the defeated Bolsheviks negotiated for peace in 1921, the main task of Polish independence was felt to be accomplished. Yet peace brought its own problems.

One was accelerated acculturation, particularly among young men. Native-born Polonians served in large numbers in the American armed forces, affirming their patriotism in the most profound way. But military service put them among Americans twenty-four hours a day, and even Mass was said by a non-Pole, devoid of ethnic hymns and sermons. These youths, speaking English as their preferred tongue, were immersed in a world outside the ethnic enclave that beckoned with increasing attraction. Government also became more active and intrusive than ever before with the Americanization campaign of wartime, which continued with diminished intensity afterward. Though often pursued locally in a spirit of encouragement rather than coercion, Polonia felt more external pressure to conform than before 1914.

In the postwar years church-oriented Poles set a new agenda for ethnicity. In a series of meetings in the early 1920s, Bishop Paul Rhode and national fraternal leaders sought to work out a new rationale for Polishness in the wake of homeland independence. They affirmed their American allegiance by rejecting political connections to the old country and urged confining relations with Poland to cultural attachments. They advocated a concentration on Polonia. Necessarily this involved a focus on the native-born. The leaders stressed the need to support Polish in parochial education and the maintenance of Polish consciousness among young people.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Przewodnik Katolicki*, April 20, 1923; William J. Galush, "American Poles and the New Poland: An Example of Change in Ethnic Orientation," *Ethnicity* 1 (December 1974): 209-221.

Statements by national figures had the quality of distant exhortation; what went on in parishes was mainly conditioned by local circumstances. Yet in many ways parishes had parallel experiences. The 1920s were a time of building. Donations grew with higher wartime wages and general postwar prosperity and pastors expanded and improved their physical plants. In New Britain alone Monsignor Lucyan Bójnowski directed a major remodeling of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church and constructed a new school. Many congregations erected new houses of worship and schools were enlarged to accommodate a flood of youngsters. These splendid structures proclaimed Polish presence and success.<sup>26</sup>

Yet elaboration was different from expansion. During the war the American hierarchy sought to prohibit the erecting of new national parishes. Soon afterward the Polish influx almost ceased due to the discriminatory immigration laws of 1921 and 1924, ending the reinforcing tide of Polish-born. Formation of ethnic congregations was essentially over. This occurred just when increasing numbers of second generation young persons reached adulthood, eager to explore America outside the Polish settlements.

Armed with better English and superior education compared to their parents, many young people began to enter the world of white collar corporate work. Wages and working conditions were better in office or sales occupations, which attracted the ambitious. This was different from upward mobility in the immigrant generation, when improvement typically meant self-employment in a little store. American corporations had no use for ethnicity, so a knowledge of Polish had small relevance, unlike for the businessman operating in the ethnic enclave. The second generation also showed an inclination to move physically. It was the emerging middle class that was most likely to relocate outside the national parishes. Slowed by the Depression of the 1930s, the exodus resumed with much greater vigor after World War II, drawing away the more affluent.

Religious life in Polonia adapted, sometimes reluctantly, to youthful inclinations. Dismaying the few radicals of the left, young Polonians showed themselves to be as pious as their parents. They attended Mass regularly, received Holy Communion more frequently and participated in parish activities. Yet the tenor of parish

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel S. Buczek, *People of God. A Centennial History of Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish*, (New Britain, CT: 1998), 19-33.

life altered. One innovation was the English sermon, appearing first in Masses for children and more slowly entering adult services. Female devotional organizations began to divide, with the younger women forming "English units" of the Rosary Society and other groups, an acknowledgment of their lesser facility with or interest in Polish. Many bishops began promoting the Holy Name Society beyond its original territorial parish base. This provided a devotional and social group in the congregation for men, who hitherto were seldom in pious associations. Holy Name was a diocesan organization, sometimes holding large meetings or rallies outside the parish. This introduced Polonians, especially the native-born, to the larger world of American Catholicism. English-speaking Catholics had greater status and the Polish American second generation sought acceptance from their more prestigious brethren.<sup>27</sup>

The most obvious form of acceptance was intermarriage. By 1940 Holy Cross Parish in Minneapolis, the parish of my father, had slightly over half of all unions involving a non-Polish spouse. Most Polish congregations saw such change come more slowly, as at Sacred Heart of New Britain with only 17% about the same time, but the trend was unmistakable.<sup>28</sup> Most were with non-Polish Catholics, but some were of mixed faiths. Children of such marriages were much less likely to retain a sense of Polishness.

Parochial government also evolved. Bishops and priests had only tolerated the elected parish committees and preferred the legally and canonically sanctioned board of trustees, dominated by clerics. The interwar period saw a decline in committee activity and importance. Age likely mellowed immigrant assertiveness, but more important was the increasing presence of adult native-born. Younger persons were taught in school to revere the priest, and also were developing interests beyond the parish and fraternal. For them acceptance of a dominant role by the pastor was less difficult than for the immigrants, for whose life-style the congregation was more central. Native-born accommodation to clerical leadership was facilitated by an increasing informality among the clergy. An item in 1927 in an English language businessman's club monthly captured the difference:

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<sup>27</sup> Lynn Dumenil, "The Tribal Twenties: 'Assimilated Catholic Response to Anti-Catholicism in the 1920s,'" *JAEH* 11 (Fall 1991): 21-49.

<sup>28</sup> Calculated from Holy Cross *Register Matrimonium*, 1940; Buczek, *Sacred Heart*, 41.

Father Poplawski umpired the kitten-ball game at the picnic again this year and in fairness to him we do say that he performed without prejudice. Like wine, "Pop" improves with age.<sup>29</sup>

Such affectionate informality was inconceivable in reference to immigrant pastors, who had a strong sense of their dignity, but native-born priests were accustomed to the casual character of American socializing. Thus while personal relationships with priests became easier, Polish Americans accepted the dominant American Catholic pattern of obedience to their religious superiors. Not surprisingly in view of this trend, the rate of formation of Polish National Catholic congregations declined sharply after 1926.<sup>30</sup>

Parochial schools recognized pressures for change and in a sense legitimated them. If before the First World War about half the curriculum was in English, this proportion steadily increased after 1920. While hard to pin down, there seem to have been several mutually reinforcing influences. With the end of mass immigration, few native Polish-speakers needed elementary education. Most children were fluent in English, and the same came to mark the nuns. The prewar influx of American-born women into habits accelerated afterward, not only improving student-teacher ratios dramatically but introducing into the classroom instructors whose knowledge of Polish was shaky. Similarly assistants were more often born here, and like the nuns they preferred the "American" tongue. Parents recognized, however reluctantly, their offsprings' inclination to use English. Taken together, these pushed parish education in the same direction. The Union of Polish Priests, mainly an organization of immigrant clergy, noted the tendency with dismay at several of its interwar meetings. Its Cleveland branch in 1927 demanded that at least one hour a day be devoted to Polish instruction, the amount itself an indication of how minimal expectations had become locally.<sup>31</sup> Despite occasional protests from older clerics and laypersons, the schools became less traditionally Polish.

Schoolbooks reflected the change. Prior to World War I firms like Dyniewicz of Chicago printed textbooks for parochial schools

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<sup>29</sup> *PNA Booster*, September, 1927.

<sup>30</sup> Kubiak, *Polish National Catholic Church*, 123.

<sup>31</sup> *Wiadomości Codzienne*, July 25, 1927.

with predominantly Polish settings or themes. After the war communities of nuns, notably the Felicians, began producing their own books, asserting their professional independence and competence. But the new *czytanki* or *elementary* (readers) were different. Vocabulary was simpler and the stories more often set in Polish-American environments.<sup>32</sup> The leading Felician author, Sister M. Cyryla, CSSF, observed at a Felician pedagogical conference in 1934 that English-speaking is "fashionable and hightone".<sup>33</sup> Despite many nuns' pleas for more Polish instruction, the Felician conferences of the thirties reluctantly accepted the trend toward English, which they concluded could not be stopped. This did not mean total surrender to Americanization. The books of Sister Cyryla and others like her were designed to at least acquaint the youngsters with their heritage, while in the process forming a Polishness that could be expressed in English.

Religion among Poles was dynamic, not static. More than most European immigrant groups Poles made heroic efforts to institutionalize their culture and belief system in its typical form: Roman Catholicism. They affirmed their membership in the universal church and their new American environment while seeking to preserve their distinctiveness. This was particularly important for the immigrants, who found in the language and religious practices of their ancestors a comforting familiarity in a strange new land. They accepted from the beginning that being in America meant adaptation, and their impressive school system drew from native models and incorporated the American tongue along with Polish language and culture. The inevitability of change was confronted creatively and in many ways successfully, as the immigrants passed on their devotion to Catholicism and a sense of Polishness to their children.

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<sup>32</sup> William J. Galush, "Making Choices: Staffing and Curriculum in Polish American Parochial Schools, 1880-1940," *History of Education Quarterly* (forthcoming).

<sup>33</sup> "Kinoteatr a Nasza Młodzieży," *Referaty 1934*, 72.



## *Polish and Polish American Studies*

The Polish Studies Program at Central Connecticut State University is a unique endeavor. It contributes to the diversity and strength of Central as a University, and is the only active program of its kind in New England with roots both on the campus and in the community.

The Program, inaugurated in January, 1974, seeks to preserve and to stimulate an awareness of Poland's history and of her contributions to European and world civilizations. The Program's core is courses in history, politics, culture, literature, language, and on the Polish American ethnic community. The Polish Heritage Collection in the University Library, numbering over 16,000 catalogued books and periodicals, supplements the course offerings. The Connecticut Polish American Archives is a research depository for the public, scholars and students of the Polish community in America. It is supported in part by the Alex M. Rudewicz Endowment.

The Program also sponsors lectures, cultural events, exhibits, recitals and concerts, and literary evenings. Our activities include the annual Fiedorczyk Lecture in Polish American Studies, the annual Milewski Lecture in Polish Studies, the biennial Godlewski Evening of Polish Culture, and the Koproski Lecture on Polish Economy and Business. The Martin & Sophie Grzyb Prize for Excellence in Polish Studies is awarded in recognition of student achievement. Recent endowments by Monsignor John P. Wodarski and Mr. Henry A. Gajda will underwrite publications of the Polish Studies Program. A generous donation from the Polish National Alliance was recently made to the Copernican Polish Heritage Endowment, and the family of Mr. Boguslaw Nowakowski has endowed a series of *Conversations about Poland*.

The Copernican Polish Heritage Endowment, which is located in the CCSU Foundation, Inc., supports all aspects of Polish Studies at the University. Donors are commemorated on the plaque in the University Library. Individuals, families, businesses, and organizations are listed in the following categories:

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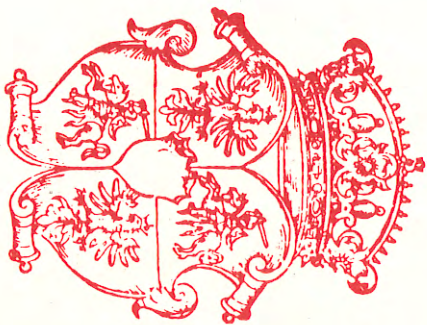
A person, family, business, or organization may wish to endow (\$10,000) a special lecture, a named scholarship, a book and publishing fund, a fund for exchange professors from Poland, a student exchange, or some other activity. These donations are commemorated with individual bronze plaques that are also in the University Library.

Our goal has been the endowment of a permanent chair of Polish and Polish American Studies at CCSU. Connecticut's Polish Americans and their friends have donated more than \$600,000. On May 7, 1997, Governor John Rowland announced a matching grant of \$600,000 from the State of Connecticut. This grant, made possible by existing state legislation, permitted the establishment of the Chair in Polish and Polish American Studies, which was inaugurated on October 29, 1997.

A major donation is being sought to name the Chair. For further information contact Professor Stanislaus A. Blejwas, the Coordinator of Polish Studies [(860) 832-2814] or Mr. Nick Pettinico, the Vice-President for University Advancement [(860) 832-1765], Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT 06050-4010.

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