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Defending Polish Roman-Catholic Parishes in the Springfield, Massachusetts Diocese. Case study of two parishes: Stanislaus Kostka in Adams and Immaculate Conception in Indian Orchard

Summary: The article outlines the conflict between the Roman-Catholic hierarchy and parishioners of two Polish churches in the Diocese of Springfield, Massachusetts: St. Stanislaus Kostka in Adams (established in 1902) and Immaculate Conception in Indian Orchard (established in 1904) who have opposed the decisions of the Bishop and subsequently have overturned them. The article traces its phases, investigates the historical and social contexts of the controversy, and attempts to diagnose the future of Polish Roman-Catholic parishes in the United States.

Key words: American Polonia, Polish Roman-Catholic Parishes in the United States, Closing of Polish Roman-Catholic Parishes in the Diocese of Springfield, Massachusetts.

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**Obrona polskich rzymskokatolickich parafii w Springfield,
diecezja Massachusetts (USA). Na przykładzie dwóch parafii:
Stanisława Kostki w Adams oraz Parafii Niepokalanego
Poczęcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny w Indian Orchard**

Streszczenie: Doniesienia o zamykaniu polskich parafii rzymsko-katolickich w Stanach Zjednoczonych wzbudzają uzasadniony niepokój Polonii amerykańskiej. Pokolenia emigrantów, które budowały infrastrukturę parafii (kościół, szkoły parafialne, plebanie), widziały w nich ucieleśnienie i przedłużenie kontaktu z ojczyzną, którą opuścili. Ośrodki te spełniały nie tylko rolę sakralną, lecz pełniły ważne funkcje społeczne i kulturowe, będąc zarazem istotnym elementem podtrzymywania tożsamości i kulturowego dziedzictwa w przybranej ojczyźnie.

W ciągu ostatnich kilku lat ten stan rzeczy dramatycznie się zmienia. Polskie parafie rzymsko-katolickie w Stanach Zjednoczonych przeżywają kryzys. Efektem tego jest kasacja licznych parafii lub łączenie kilku parafii w jedną. Decyzje te spotykają się z różną reakcją parafian: od rezygnacji i pogodzenia się z decyzją biskupów poprzez pełne determinacji protesty. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia dwie polskie parafie rzymsko-katolickie Diecezji Springfield, Massachusetts, które podjęły, aktywne działania, starając się odwrócić decyzje władz kościelnych. Artykuł kreśli tło historyczne i społeczne konfliktu, przedstawia kolejne jego fazy, a także podejmuje próbę postawienia diagnozy, co do dalszych losów polskich parafii w Stanach Zjednoczonych.

Słowa-klucze: Polonia amerykańska, polskie parafie rzymsko-katolickie w Stanach Zjednoczonych, kasacja polskich parafii rzymsko-katolickich w Diecezji Springfield, Massachusetts.

In his „Profile of Polish Americans: Data From the 2000 U.S. Census”, published in „Polish American Studies”, Jason C. Booza writes:

Overall, persons of Polish ancestry, whether foreign or domestic born, are similar in their overall demographic characteristics to the general American population, but they also differ in important areas. The family characteristics of the population favor married couple families with lower divorce rates and fewer single parent households. There are also far fewer families living below poverty which is related to the fact that Poles have an above average education and earnings which is further related to the fact that a large percentage of the population is employed in professional and managerial occupations. When compared to the population that arrived in the United States nearly 100 years ago, Poles have made much advancement as a population and community. Areas of the country still continue to attract Polish immigrants while existing Polish communities continue to thrive as second and third generation Poles continue to populate traditional Polish areas¹.

These „traditional areas” are however undergoing significant transformations due to new social and demographic challenges. The Polish Catholic parishes which had been an inseparable element of Polish communities struggle to retain their ethnic identity² and economic integrity. Recent years have revealed considerable social and cultural changes in the Polish-American communities among which is the alarming increase in the suppression (closing), merging and clustering of Polish Roman-Catholic parishes founded by previous generations. Polish immigrants built the infrastructure of these parishes which usually consisted of the church building, parochial school and the rectory. In them they saw the embodiment and the extension of the homeland they had left in the Old Country. Parishes became centers not only in the religious sense. They fulfilled spiritual needs

¹ C. J. Booza, *Profile of Polish Americans: Data From the 2000 U.S. Census*, „Polish American Studies”, Vol. LXIV, No. 1 (Spring 2007), s. 74.

² This is how Barbara Leś (1981, 18) characterizes an ethnic parish: “[It] is a social group whose members share and the consciousness of a common ethnic origin and common language, create relatively close communities ... and here satisfy not only their religious needs but also, in a significant degree needs resulting from their ethnic consciousness ... “ (my translation).

and also functioned as the focus of social and cultural life of the Polish minority in the United States at the same time helping to sustain cultural heritage and national identity in the host country. Now many of them, sometimes of high artistic value, are being closed and put on auction to be sold on secular property market (some of them end up after refurbishing as apartment buildings) or are demolished and the lots are built over by commercial businesses or become plain parking lots. (Make a note of the Postscript of this article.) Reports of these changes are of great concern of American Polonia and the decisions of closures of Polish parishes by the Roman-Catholic hierarchy are met with extreme reactions:

- ▶ from total submission to the decisions of the bishops,
- ▶ to full of determination protests.

Extreme cases result in leaving the formal structures of the Roman-Catholic Church. Year 2006 brought the case of the St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Catholic Parish in Saint Louis, Missouri where parishioners and the pastor, Marek B. Bożek, did not comply with the decree of Archbishop of the Archdiocese, Raymond L. Burke and was excommunicated. As is declared on parish's website <http://saintstan.org/index.html>: "We proudly profess Catholic faith and celebrate Catholic sacraments, but we are no longer a part of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, nor do we belong to the institutional Roman Catholic Church". A similar case, however on a much wider scale, had taken place in reference with the formation of the Polish National Church in 1897.

In this article I will outline the conflict between the Roman-Catholic hierarchy and parishioners of two Polish churches in the Diocese of Springfield, Massachusetts: St. Stanislaus Kostka in Adams (established in 1902), (Photo 1 and 2) and Immaculate Conception in Indian Orchard (established in 1904), (Photo 5) who have opposed the decisions of the Bishop and subsequently have overturned them. The article will trace its phases, investigate the historical and social contexts of the controversy, and attempt to diagnose the future of Polish Roman-Catholic parishes in the United States. The article is a result of research of unpublished documents and materials gathered in parish and private archives as well as press releases of the local newspapers, mainly in digital form available online.

Miracle on Hoosac Street

The decree of the Bishop of the Springfield Diocese, Timothy McDonnell of August 2008, closed, merged or clustered 10 Polish parishes in the Diocese, among them St. Stanislaus Kostka which is located on Hoosac Street in Adams Massachusetts. Parishioners, opposing the decision of the Bishop have decided to keep a 24-hour vigil as a form of protest. (Photo 3 and 4) In January 2011, after 1150 days, Vatican's Congregation for the Clergy ruled that the Bishop didn't justify closing St. Stanislaus which means that the church will reopen for worship. Parishioners and many who supported the protest announced this as a miracle, miracle on Hoosac Street.

Vatican's decision was met with an outburst of enthusiasm. Here are a few quotes from the local press:

"Our faith was very strong," said Norma Tomkowicz, 80, who, along with her 81-year-old husband, Hank, were active vigilers and organizers of the group. (Web 1)

"They figured we'd give up," said Francis Hajdas, 75, a vigil organizer. "Well, we had something to prove to the bishop and those people in Springfield. We were ready to stick out our vigil much longer if we had to." (Web 1)

"We became as close as a family," said Loretta Rysz-Vinette, 81, whose 15-hour weekly commitment came in three-hour shifts each weekday afternoon. "We never lost hope and eventually our prayers were answered." (Web 1)

"Our parents and grandparents built this church with their sweat and tears and we weren't going to give that up." said Dick Kuza, 70. (Web 1)

Mary Krutiak spends four hours a week at St. Stanislaus, where she celebrated First Communion, got married, baptized her children and buried her parents.

"My whole life is in this church," she said. (Web 2)

On the 9th of August, 2008 Bishop of the Springfield Diocese Timothy McDonnell sent a letter to parishioners of three Roman-Catholic churches in Adams, among them to parishioners of the Polish church of St. Stanislaus

Kostka. The bishop starts the letter with references to the Mullen Report, the result of the work of a commissioned study at the Center for Economic Development at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst “perform a planning study which would *serve to inform discussions concerning the future configuration of parishes within the Diocese*”³.

The conclusion of the report was a that due to economic conditions a thorough reform of the Diocese is indispensable, and that it is time to “move on”. From the report we learn that the number of priests is decreasing, many retire and there a no new vocations; the number of faithful who are supporting parishes is decreasing which in consequence causes economical problems in maintaining churches. According to the Bishop these arguments are the base for the decision to close St. Stanislaus Kostka church in Adams. The basic question which is formulated by the Bishop and the Pastoral Planning Commission is: “Are we a people of church buildings, or a church of people building faith?” But admits that:

There is no question that for each of us the church building is a memory box. It is the place where some of the highlights of our life were undertaken. It is the place of Baptisms, First Communions and Confirmations, of marriages and funerals. It is a place of great joy and many sorrows. It is the place that helps us to recall the past as we work for the future; and yet the building itself is not the repository of those memories. They exist in our minds and hearts. As we travel on our pilgrim way, we carry them with us as those that that came before us carried them and went on to build us parishes. They carried with them memories of these special places in the past, even across the sea, and built new memories in new places. I pray you will be able to do the same⁴.

“In Adams, there is only one Catholic Community; therefore, the two parishes in Adams will be consolidated into one parish named for Pope Paul the Great... St. Stanislaus school remains as is, but St. Thomas and St. Stanislaus Church will close”⁵.

³ Eugene Michalenko Private Archive.

⁴ Tamże.

⁵ Tamże.

The decision was met with “shock, disbelief and anger” of St. Stanislaus Kostka parishioners. Reaction of the parishioners was immediate. As early as 15th of August, they issue a formal appeal (remonstratio) in which they opposed the Bishop’s decree and presented their arguments. This began a series of letter exchanges between the Bishop and parishioners but which however did not change the decision to close the church⁶.

On the 12th of September an appeal letter to His Eminence, Claudio Cardinal Hummes, Congregation for the Clergy in Rome was sent which began in dramatic words said:

Your Eminence:

We, as parishioners of St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish in Adams, Massachusetts, USA, file this appeal on behalf of our parish community, as well as on our own behalf as individual aggrieved parish faithful. We hereby petition Congregation for the Clergy to intervene in the matter of the closing/merger/suppression ... of our parish. ...

Our church is slated to be closed in 15 weeks on Dec. 28,2008, therefore we would like to submit this as soon as possible. ... The parishioners of St. Stanislaus Kostka church are asking the Congregation for the Clergy to reverse the decision of the Most Revered Timothy McDonnell, Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield, MA, USA, to close St Stanislaus Kostka Church⁷.

The appeal refers to Canonical Law according to which the parish closure is not justified. The main argument being that the decision of the Bishop was not supported by any convincing arguments, it was “arbitrary and capricious”. Due to these arguments is should be reversed.

Probably due to political/tactical reasons the appeal did not bring up “ethnic” or historical arguments. There is no trace relating to the fact that the material fabric of the parish (the church, school and the rectory) was funded and erected by recent Polish immigrants. As John Radzilowski writes in *Social History of Polish-American Catholicism*:

⁶ Tamże.

⁷ Tamże.

Impoverished, working-class immigrant communities poured tremendous resources into building parish churches, schools, and related institutions. ... Polish immigrants raised churches that transcended the hardships of early industrial life and pointed to the hoped-for world they wished for their children and grandchild and toward the Heaven that existed beyond their own lives. This often came at great personal sacrifice. The stained glass windows at Sweetest Heart of Mary Parish in Detroit won a prize at the Columbian Exposition of 1893. When this stunningly beautiful church ran into financial trouble, its Polish immigrant parishioners put their own tiny houses up as collateral. Such painful sacrifices bred a tremendous sense of ownership and pride for in the old country only the nobility could endow churches, but in America the former peasants were now the gentry. This brought with it some expectations of having a say in the running of the parish which they, not the bishop, had built and fueled conflicts over parish control. (Indeed, nearly all conflicts within Polish parishes were over administrative, leadership, and financial issues rather than theology or doctrine.) At the same time, the building of these parishes bound them to America in a way no civics lesson could equal. As one scholar put it, Polish churches “stood as visible reminders that God had come with the immigrants on their long journey and that perhaps the voyage had been worth it. They were the stone and mortar roots that bound them to the soul of the new world”.⁵¹⁸

These were the “sweat and tears”, words that one of the protesters previously mentioned.

On the 26th of December, 2008, over 200 parishioners of St. Stanislaus Kostka undertook a decision to occupy the church round-the-clock in a peaceful protest defending the closure of the church and the removal of liturgical items and devotional articles. Many feared that if the church was empty it would be irretrievably lost.

The solution came after 1150 days of holding the vigil when the Vatican’s Congregation for the Clergy reversed Bishop Timothy McDonnell’s decision.

In an article published on the 16th of February, 2011 in “The Boston Globe” under the headline “Vatican halts closing of 3 Mass. parishes. Springfield diocese decision overruled” which stated:

⁸ J. Radzilowski, *Social History of Polish-American Catholicism*, “U.S. Catholic Historian”, Volume 27, Number 3, Summer 2009, s. 35-37.

In a rare victory for Catholics challenging parish closings, the Vatican has rejected an effort of the Diocese of Springfield to end worship at three churches in Western Massachusetts. Church officials in Rome ruled that the Springfield Diocese did not adequately justify its decision to close two churches in Chicopee, St Patrick and St. George, and a third in Adams, St. Stanislaus Kostka. In Adams, parishioners have held an around-the-clock vigil for more than two years. (Web 3)

On the same day a press release was issued by the Springfield Diocese informing of Vatican's ruling⁹.

Immaculate Conception Parish in Indian Orchard

Different was the scenario of protest in defense of the Polish Parish of Immaculate Conception Parish in Indian Orchard. The decree of the Bishop of the Springfield Diocese, Timothy McDonnell of August 2008, mentioned above also closed the Immaculate Conception Parish which was to be merged with the Christ the King Parish in Ludlow.

Several days after the announcement of the decision by the Bishop a parish meeting took place during which a resolution to defend the church and the parish was taken. (Photo 6)

One of the headlines in the local paper read: "Members of Immaculate Conception Church in Springfield's Indian Orchard vow to fight to keep parish alive" and the first words of the article read: "Defying a diocesan decree that their parish is to merge with one in Ludlow, more than 200 members of Immaculate Conception in Indian Orchard packed into the church in hopes of acting fast to find ways to keep the parish alive.

The meeting was tempestuous, full of anger desperation of the parishioners.

Parishioner Jerzy Furgal said he has heard that the diocese has already sold the church property to a drug store chain for \$4 million. 'If that is true, the bishop should be carried out in a wheel barrow and taken to the dumpster,' he said. The crowd cheered ... Parishioners discussed appealing the diocese's decision, all

⁹ EMPA.

the way to the Vatican if necessary. If that does not work, there was also talk of hiring a good lawyer, and ultimately, a protest vigil where parishioners were taken over the church and refused to leave¹⁰.

In result, a committee "Save Immaculate Conception" took form, a Web page informing of the protest was set up (www.saveioicc.com) and a full scale media campaign was initiated. It involved:

- ...Vigils: Saturdays after 4:00 pm Mass until 10:00 pm: Illuminate the night with candles.

- ...Adoration: Efforts are continuing to extend the adoration in the chapel to 10:00 pm on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. A signup sheet has been posted for signatures. Suggestion was made that groups of people could sign up and if one person in the group can't make it, perhaps another might.

A minimum of two people is needed when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed.

- ...Peaceful protest on Sunday at St. Michael's Cathedral starting at 9:15 am: This Sunday, the bus will leave our parking lot at 9:30. The Bishop will be celebrating the 10:00 o'clock Mass. Let's have a great representation to express our unity and dedication! Continuation of demonstrations/ rallies will be discussed at this Monday's meeting.

- ...Press/media coverage continues. Father James Scahill of St. Michael's, East Longmeadow, appeared on our behalf on Channel 22 Tuesday, September 29. Parishioners at St. Cecilia's, Wilbraham, and St. Mary's, Longmeadow, are praying for our success. A priest in Coventry, Rhode Island, expressed his disappointment last Sunday at the pulpit for the way we have been treated. We also made the news in southern New Jersey.

- ...Fundraising social events after 4:00 pm Mass: October 17 - dinner/dance at Polish-American Citizens Club, Ludlow - \$30 (150 of the 350 tickets already sold) - \$20 raffle tickets for 50-inch plasma TV (Ted Bukowski 599-4745); October 24 - pasta dinner - \$10 adults, \$5 seniors and children under 12 - bake sale (Martha

¹⁰ Web 4.

Lavalette 543-2132). Contact the aforementioned for volunteering to cook, bake, and donate raffle prizes.

- ...Donations: In the Save Indian Orchard Immaculate Conception Church Fund
- Total \$8,276: donations \$4,272, meat loaf dinner \$3,489, and T-shirts \$515.
A great start!

- ...Postcards addressed to the Bishop: Forty-two people from other parishes have signed the cards. Asking for signatures is a good way of getting people to talk about it and getting the word out. The card reads, "Please save our parishes. A review of the Pastoral Planning Commission is in order"._

- ...Billboards have been attracting much attention on Route 5, Memorial Avenue rotary, West Springfield – Route 291 near Indian Orchard exit 5 – Route 91 South across from the Basketball Hall of Fame. Consideration was given to have persons near the West Springfield billboard on Sunday, but the decision was shelved.

- ...Attorney: Diane Budzyna is working with the attorney. More research will be done on the deeds and parcels. The church, its land, and the rectory belong to the Bishop. The convent, school, and field will be researched.

- ...Historical site: Scott Hanson, Springfield Planning Department, has completed the work for the Immaculate Conception property to be designated a Historical District. This was to be put to vote by the Springfield Historical Commission on Thursday, October 1, at City Hall. Mr. Hanson was optimistic about its passage as all members were in favor at the last meeting. Once passed by vote, the paper work will be sent to Boston for approval on the state level. Dave Hudyka has requested copies of the documents. There will be an update on this subject in next week's issue.

- ...Visuals – Signs are disappearing, especially from the lawns of our Ludlow parishioners. It was suggested that people keep their eyes open and report such incidents to us. For bumper stickers and T-shirts, please call Luci Saloio at 244-5467. The website is up to date.

...Zone change: On October 14 at 7:00 pm at their Main Street office, the Indian Orchard Citizens Council will take a vote on our petition for the zone change from Residence A and B to Residence A. That vote goes to the Planning Commission, meeting on October 21 at 6:00 pm at the City Hall, downtown Springfield. No one opposed us at the last meeting, and there were about 100 people in attendance. Let's increase that number by at least 10!¹¹

The logic of "the Zone change" strategy was to at least save the historical material fabric of the parish for further generations, and this strategy turned out to be most effective. "Immaculate Conception parishioners ... [petitioned] the Springfield Historical Commission to request that the board create a historic district for the church campus"¹². After a year of legal struggles the property with its buildings (the church, the school and the rectory) gained the status of a Historical District. "That status ... [s] the property certain protections under state law; most significant, the owner of a property within a historic district needs the approval of the Historical Commission to demolish a building or make any exterior changes"¹³. The danger was over.

To understand the determination of the faithful of both parishes and the standpoint of the Diocese hierarchy we need to look at deeper historical and social roots of the conflict. Protests of both parishes echo the American tradition of civil disobedience and the long history of friction between Polish Americans and the American Roman-Catholic hierarchy. Hieronim Kubiak, discussing the Polish National Catholic Church in the United States¹⁴, notes:

From the beginning of its existence in United States Catholic Church did not constitute a unified entity. As a matter of fact, as early as the 19th century groups of German, French, and English Catholics functioned in opposition to each

¹¹ Grzegorz Głębocki Private Archive.

¹² Web 5.

¹³ Tamże.

¹⁴ In this article I quote the 1970 Polish edition. However, I am aware of the extended English version published in 1980 under the title *The Polish National Catholic Church in the United States of America from 1897 to 1980: its social conditioning and social functions* to which unfortunately I did not have access.

other. Each of these groups colored Catholicism with their own qualities brought from Europe and each group needed the universalist essence of religion which was implemented for their own national and cultural separatist needs^{15, 16}

The Roman Catholic church Polish immigrants encountered in America was in many ways alien to them. Theoretically it was the same religion but in practice it was very much different from what they had left behind. The saints were different – how could they, for example, relate to St. Patrick, the saint of the Irish. Although the mass and other celebrations were said in Latin, they did not understand the language of the sermons and ... how to confess your sins since you do not speak the language of the priest? They were Catholic but unable to fully express their religious feelings and needs. Since the American Roman Catholic church was dominated by the Irish community, very often they “complained of Irish control of the church. Although deeply religious [they] did not feel at home in what they called the ‘Irish-Catholic Church’” of the United States¹⁷. “Catholic hierarchy represented by the Irish ... attempted to see in Catholicism not religion supporting separatism but the ideology of supra-ethnic unity ...”¹⁸

However, recent Polish immigrants longed for the “old time religion” of their forefathers: familiar saints who guarded and protected them, religious songs sung in Polish which elevated their soul, familiar architecture and decorations of the church, roadside crosses and chapels – an integral part of the rural landscape, the ceremonies, celebrations and feasts which were closely connected with farming and the cycles of nature (feasts so cherished and which echo pagan traditions, like for example *Matki Boskiej Siewnej* – Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated on the 8th of September; *Matki Boskiej Zielnej* – Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated on the 15th of August)¹⁹.

¹⁵ H. Kubiak, *Polski Narodowy Kościół Katolicki w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki w latach 1897–1965: jego społeczne unwarunkowania i społeczne funkcje*, Zakład Narodowy im Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1970, s. 53.

¹⁶ All translations from the Polish language in this article are mine.

¹⁷ J.A. Wytrwal, *America's Polish Heritage. A Social History of the Poles in America*, Detroit, Endurance Press, 1961, s. 169.

¹⁸ H. Kubiak, dz. cyt., s. 55.

¹⁹ The official names of feasts used in the American Catholic Church do not reflect Polish peasant farming traditions; where the feast of “*Matki Boskiej Siewnej*” signifies sowing and planting, and “*Matki Boskiej Zielnej*” refers to the blessing of herbs.

“Similarly as other immigrant groups, Poles began their process of adaptation to American conditions by reconstructing traditional religious institutions known from the Old Country”²⁰. And as Kubiak further notes, the significance of the parish was the embodiment of the local community with which the Polish peasant immigrant to America could identify with²¹.

Deeper, cultural issue underlying the conflict between the American Roman Catholic Church and the monoethnic Polish parishes established by recent immigrants was noticed as early as 1927 by Znaniecki and Thomas who saw the incompatibility and the inability of Polish peasant immigrants to adjust to American version of Catholicism as caused by the fact that Polish version of Catholicism was to a great extent infused by pagan and magical beliefs in animated natural objects and spirits.

What we seek at this point is a determination of the fundamental attitudes shown by the peasant in his religious and magical life ... [W]e find four partially independent types: (1) general animation of natural objects, but no spirits distinct from the objects themselves; solidarity of life in nature; no distinction possible between religion and magic; (2) belief in a world of spirits, partly useful, partly harmful, and distinct from natural objects; the beliefs are religious, the practice is magical; (3) absolute distinction of good and evil spirits; the relation with the good spirits is religious and expressed in social ceremonies, the relation with bad spirits is magical and established individually. (4) Introduction of mysticism, tendency to self-perfection and salvation; personal relation with the divinity²².

Establishing Polish parishes “in the image of what they had known in the old country”²³ was a form of reconstructing and “reimagining” the lost cultural elements, at the same time retaining ethnic and cultural identity and integrity. The parish “would assure the permanence of the social cohesion of the colony

²⁰ H. Kubiak, dz. cyt., s. 70.

²¹ Tamże.

²² F. Znaniecki, W.I. Thomas, *Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1927, s. 206.

²³ J.A. Wytrwal, dz. cyt., s. 159.

... [to] become the center of all social and cultural activities”²⁴. With great energy the process of establishing Polish parishes began. The first church to be erected thanks to the funds of Polish immigrants was in the settlement of Panna Maria in Texas, in 1856²⁵ and by 1910 there were about six hundred Polish churches in the United States and perhaps a thousand priests²⁶. With the little resources they had, the recent immigrants contributed greatly to the building of the churches which were erected without state or diocese support. The architecture, in most cases, mirrored the “Old Country” esthetic code. Polish-American church buildings differ significantly from other “ethnic” structures often resembling neo-gothic, neo-classical, or baroque style of country churches in Poland. The interior decorations also reflected the nostalgia for the lost home church with its village style. Numerous newly established parishes were dedicated to strictly Polish saints: Our Lady of Częstochowa, Our Lady of Ostrobrama, St. Hedwig, St. Stanislaus Bishop & Martyr’s, St. Casimir, Our Lady of Jasna Góra, St. Stanislaus Kostka, to name just a few examples.

In the attempt to diagnose the situation and speculate on the future of Polish Roman-Catholic parishes in the United States a number of questions arise:

- ▶ will Polish parishes survive,
- ▶ will the Roman-Catholic church in the United States in the future be universal or retain its ethnic roots?

It is a fact that in the last 50 years the number of faithful participating in mass and supporting parishes has drastically decreased. For example, in the Springfield Diocese the number decreased from 600,000 to about 220,000²⁷. The main reason is the general secularization of the society, but as is the case with other ethnic groups, also Polonia has undergone significant social and demographical changes. One of the processes was the exodus of parishioners from the original, established by immigrants parishes into the suburbs²⁸. It was

²⁴ Tamże.

²⁵ H. Kubiak, dz. cyt., s. 72.

²⁶ J. A. Wytrwał, dz. cyt., s. 169.

²⁷ Web 5.

²⁸ W.J. Galush, *Faith and Fatherland. Dimensions of Polish-American Ethnoreligion, 1875–1975*, [w:] *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America*, red. R.M. Miller and T.D. Marzik, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1977, s. 98.

the effect of the general mobility of the American society after the Second World War which particularly intensified in the sixties and seventies of the 20th century. Although many faithful still supported the original parish their ties became loose due to the geographical distance and eventually were broken. The original Polish ethnic ghettos where the church was its center and the whole social and cultural life focused around it has changed significantly with the influx of other minorities, particularly Latino and African-Americans. The monoethnic character of the Polish parish is the feature of the past²⁹.

Another reason was a gradual acculturation of descendants of Polish immigrants. In the second and third generation marriages with partners outside the ethnic group became more frequent. A systematic decrease of endogamy and the rise of exogamy could be observed³⁰.

Therefore necessary are reforms in the church. Some of the former social and cultural functions of the ethnic church are being taken over by secular institutions such as cultural centers not tied with religion but cultivating identity and cultural heritage. In the Springfield, Mass. area it is the Polish Center of Discovery and Learning:

[...] a living monument that celebrates the many contributions, both past and present, made to the economy, arts, and sciences of our nation by Polish people and their descendants. The mission of the Center at Elms College is to preserve objects representative of the material culture of the Polish people in America; to provide guidance and support materials to schools and other institutions wishing to introduce Polish topics to their students; and to offer a variety of workshops, exhibits, concerts, conferences, seminars, films, plays, lectures and other events that focus on the history and cultural traditions of the Polish people in Europe and the United States³¹.

The case of the discussed above Springfield Diocese is exceptional taking into account the whole of the American Roman-Catholic church. On the 12th

²⁹ For more information on the transformation of Polish ethnic parishes, see Barbara Leś, *Kościół w procesie asymilacji Polonii amerykańskiej: przemiany funkcji polonijnych instytucji i organizacji religijnych w środowisku Polonii chicagowskiej*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław-Kraków 1981.

³⁰ W.J. Galush, dz. cyt., s. 98.

³¹ Web 6.

of August, 2014 in the Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel, the Most Rev. Mitchell T. Rozanski became the ninth bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield. It would not be anything extraordinary but he is the first bishop of Polish heritage in the history of the diocese. The coat of arms created for the new bishop bear both his new appointment and also reflect his Polish heritage³². “The upper half of the Bishop’s personal arms is composed of a silver (white) field and a red field. These are the colors of the Polish national flag; honoring the Bishop’s Polish [roots]”³³.

Bishop’s Rozanski’s homily during his Installation Mass deserves a word of commentary. It was delivered in three languages: English and, Polish and Spanish which was a compliment toward both Polonia and the Hispanic communities which today comprises the core of the Roman-Catholic Church in the United States. This is what he said (in broken) Polish:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus, today at this installation Mass, I wear a cross that is a gift from Archbishop Lori, archbishop of Baltimore, who is present with us today. The cross is the replica of the one worn by St. John Paul II when he was archbishop of Krakow and as our Holy Father. This cross reminds me of the Catholic Faith that unites us so closely in our Polish heritage.

It reminds all of us of the Poland that suffered so much under atheistic regimes and yet thrived because of the Catholic Faith. We have relied on the help of God in the past and we will continue to do so in the present and in the future, knowing that Good Shepherd who watched over Poland during years of trial gives us the joy to witness our cherished Faith to others. I thank God for the gift of this rich heritage, especially the gift of the Catholic faith that keeps us rooted in Christ and secure in the love of His blessed Mother. Please keep me in your prayers as I begin my ministry in this diocese that I may always seek to do God’s will as Chief Shepherd here³⁴.

Local Polonia received the new bishop with hope that Polish parishes in the diocese under his leadership will have his support in their struggle to save

³² Web 7.

³³ Web 8.

³⁴ Web 9.

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the material heritage of their forefathers and at the same time preserve their ethnic identity.

Concluding, I would like to note that the transformations taking place before our eyes are essential in the cultural history of Polish-Americans in the United States and there is a need for a broader research project in this area.

Postscript:

On December 11, 2018, immediately with the issuance of a demolition permit to the Diocese, the Polish Parish Church building of Mater Dolorosa, Holyoke, Massachusetts, founded in 1896 ceased to exist³⁵. (Photo 7 and 8) Mary Wolamian, witness of the demolition, said:

That's very sad day today ... That's what they did for the Polish people, for us ... My heart is very, very hurt ... It's very, very disappointing³⁶.

I would like to thank Eugene Michalenko, Member of the St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish Council, Adams, Mass., and Grzegorz Głębocki, Member of the Immaculate Conception Parish Council, Indian Orchard, Mass., who have encouraged me to write about their struggles to save their parishes, assisted me in gathering materials and made possible access to their private archives. Without their continuous support the article would not be possible.

³⁵ Web 11.

³⁶ Web 10.

Photo 1. St. Stanislaus Kostka, Hoosac Street, Adams Massachusetts.
Photo by the author.

Photo 2. St. Stanislaus Kostka, Hoosac Street, Adams Massachusetts.
Photo by the author.

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Photo 3. St. Stanislaus Kostka, Hoosac Street, Adams Massachusetts.
Photo by „Times Union”.

Photo 4. St. Stanislaus Kostka in Adams, Massachusetts.
Photo by „Time”.

Photo 5. Immaculate Conception in Indian Orchard, Massachusetts.
Photo by the author.

Photo 6. Immaculate Conception in Indian Orchard, Massachusetts.
Photo by „MassLive.com”.

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Photo 7. Mater Dolorosa Parish Curch, Holyoke, Massachusetts.
Photo by „MassLive.com”.

Photo 8. Mater Dolorosa Parish Curch, Holyoke, Massachusetts.
Photo by „MassLive.com”.

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