



### **History of St. Joseph Polish Church.**

Diamond Jubilee St. Joseph's Polish Church, Denver, Colorado  
CAP at Orchard Lake.

On Sunday afternoon, August 17, 1902, the parishioners of the recently- formed St. Joseph's Polish Roman Catholic Church gathered on the corner of Third and North Pearl (now 46th Avenue and Pennsylvania) in Globeville for an important ceremony. They had come together to witness their pastor, Rev. Theodore Jarzynski, and Bishop N. C. Matz of Denver, lay the cornerstone of their church.

The Denver Times noted:

*"A long felt want of the Polish Catholics of Globeville is about to be filled. For many years it has been the desire of their hearts to erect a house of worship of their own and this desire is about to be satisfied. . . . The new building will cost \$2,000, which amount has been raised by the untiring zeal of the Catholics of that town, ably seconded by the Rev. Theodore Jarzynski. . ."*

The small church seating about 200, designed by a Mr. Parrot and built by Frank Kirchof, was completed in time for the first mass to be said on Christmas Day 1902. St. Joseph's thereby joined the ranks of Denver's Catholic parishes as the twelfth oldest after the Immaculate Conception Cathedral (1860). Since that time St. Joseph's has served uninterruptedly on its original site as a national parish for the Polish community of the entire Denver archdiocese. On its seventy-fifth anniversary it remains the oldest, continually-functioning Polish parish between western Nebraska and California.

The origins of St. Joseph's predate in a sense the arrival of its first pastor in July, 1902, Rev. Jarzynski, and the construction of the church. The nucleus of the parish consisted of a small group of Polish immigrants, who in the early 1880's began settling in what would come to be called Globeville, then a separate community several miles north of downtown Denver. They were not, however, the first Poles in the region, as people of Polish descent had already been on the territory of the future state of Colorado in 1847 and 1853, and more than a dozen had come to Denver during the 1859 Gold Rush. The Globeville Poles were nevertheless the first to come to the area from partitioned Poland as part of the so-called economic immigration, which brought millions of European immigrants to the United States between the end of the Civil War and 1914.

Most of the early arrivals in Globeville came from the Plock gubernia northwest of Warsaw in the Russian sector of partitioned Poland. The prospect of employment in the local smelters attracted them to Globeville. Many sought better economic opportunities away from increased Russification and new restrictions imposed on them by the czar. Others, particularly younger male family members, did not wish to serve in the czarist army of the despised partitioned of their country. The presence

of about two dozen families in Globeville by the mid-1880's is indicated by the formation in 1888 of St. Martin's Lodge, Group #134 of the Polish National Alliance, and St. Joseph's Society, Group #62, of the Polish Union of North America. Both of these organizations point up the community's interest in mutual, self-help in an era which knew no welfare programs or social security.

By the turn of the century the community was large enough to realistically consider the formation of a parish. Prior to that time the Poles attended St. Anne's (later Annunciation), a two-mile walk from Globeville, as streetcar lines were not yet laid and few at that time could afford a horse and buggy. At a mass meeting held on September 27, 1900, the St. Joseph's Polish Roman Catholic Church and School Committee was organized and the following trustees elected: John Wargin, Thomas Barnas, Joseph Kolecki, Michael Brzeziński, Andrew Mantych, Marian Chojnowski and Gabriel Cymanski. At that time, too, a Mr. Tynon donated the four lots on which the church would be built. On November 22, 1900, Bishop Matz permitted the committee to begin collecting funds for the church, and issued the following circular letter on its behalf:

*Bishop's House 235 So. Evans Denver, Colorado Nov. 22, 1900*

*TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN*

*Whereas at a meeting of the St. Joseph's Polish Roman Catholic Association held on the 17 of Nov. 1900 the following gentlemen, viz: D. F. Raims, Frank Yozviak, Marian Chojnowski, Michael Wandray have been duly selected as collectors for said Polish Roman Catholic Church, and whereas said Association in unison with the Bishop, Rt. Rev. N. C. Matz, is trying to erect a Church for the benefit of its members which comprises all the Polanders of this City of Denver; We hereby approve of these above named parties as collectors for said Church, intended exclusively for the Polanders.*

*They are therefore authorized to collect funds for said Church from all Polanders residing in the City of Denver and suburbs as well as elsewhere in the state of Colorado. This Church will be erected in Globeville on grounds held in trust by the Bishop for the exclusive use of all Polanders in this City of Denver and suburbs. We earnestly recommend this undertaking to all the Polanders of Denver and Colorado.*

*Given in Denver this 22 day of Nov. 1900,*

*Bishop of Denver*

Although the committee solicited funds, it had no priest at that time, nor any certainty of receiving one. Nevertheless, in 1902 Bishop Matz succeeded in getting Rev. T. Jarzynski for Denver. Fr. Jarzynski, born near Plock, Poland on October 13, 1869, had completed his religious studies at the Lublin Diocesan Seminary by 1895 and that same year entered the seminary of the Congregation of the Holy Cross at Notre Dame, Indiana; he was ordained for that order two years later. Prior to coming to Denver, Fr. Jarzynski served as curate at St. Hedwig's in South Bend and in 1899 as temporary pastor of St. Stanislaus B. & M. parish in the same city; and in 1900 as assistant at Holy Trinity, the third oldest Polish Roman Catholic parish in Chicago; and in 1900-02, following his dispensation from the Holy Cross order, as assistant to Rev. J. F. Szukalski of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Milwaukee. Until St. Joseph's church and later the rectory were completed, Fr. Jarzynski resided at the home of Frank

Wargin at 4698 Pennsylvania Street in Globeville. Here daily and Sunday mass were celebrated. The first recorded baptism of St. Joseph's was that of Matthew Bizjak, a Slovenian, on August 7, 1902, and the first marriage performed was between Vincent Prisels and Anna Simsic, also Slovenians, on October 15 of that same year.

St. Joseph's grew quietly during its first decade. While the parish began with some two dozen families in 1900-02, the number climbed to 100 by 1912. The rise resulted both from immigration from Galicia (southeast Poland) after 1900 and from the influx to Denver of Polish families who had previously established themselves in various Polish enclaves in large Eastern and Midwestern cities. St. Joseph's early assumed the routine associated with parish life. Sunday mass was celebrated at 8 and 10 a.m., and daily mass at 8 a.m. On Sundays after dinner, Fr. Jarzynski taught two one-hour Sunday school classes for the children of his Polish, Slovenian and Croatian parishioners, followed by vespers at 3 p.m. Older parishioners recall that gazing about during these classes was frequently rewarded by a rap on one's nose with a long pencil which "Fr. Jarr", as he was popularly known, carried for that purpose.

The development of parish life was also reflected in the formation of a variety of religiously-oriented and fraternal societies like St. Adalbert's and St. Casimir's. They also functioned as important channels of social activities and needed fundraising for the parish. In these early days the parishioners and their customarily large families did not enjoy an easy life. While they gave generously to the church, they worked long and hard for low wages which seem incomprehensible today. Whole families frequently supplemented their meager earnings by toiling from late spring to early fall in the sugar beet fields of northeastern Colorado. Daughters worked at the Lindquist Cracker Company in Denver to bolster family income. These Polish immigrant families thusly achieved a modicum of financial prosperity, thereby realizing the American dream and establishing a well-kept ethnic enclave in Globeville which existed almost unchanged until the early 1950's.

During the first decade of its existence, St. Joseph's became established as the focal point for many years to come of Denver's organized Polish Christian community. In addition to important moments in life such as baptisms, weddings and funerals, St. Joseph's parishioners celebrated religious and national holidays which have occasioned some of the most beautiful customs associated with the Poles, and many of which are still widely practiced by their American descendants. Fr. Jarzynski encouraged their observance because his parish was a Polish one and because these customs had been an inherent part of his parishioners' lives in partitioned Poland. On Christmas Eve, for example, everyone held the traditional Wigilia (Christmas Eve supper) with the sharing among all family members of the oplatek, the unleavened wafer embossed with seasonal religious pictures, followed by caroling and midnight mass. Easter, also marked by mass, was remembered for its pungent buffets of holiday fare to be blessed by the priest. . . and for seemingly endless rounds of visiting. Dingus, or Easter Monday, saw the community's young ladies get drenched with buckets of water or sprayed with perfume, depending on the proclivities of its young men. And Boze Cialo, Corpus Christi, was characterized by a large, public procession starting from St. Joseph's and winding through the streets of Globeville. May 3rd, or Polish Constitution Day, was celebrated by a large, colorful parade down Washington Street, the main thoroughfare, and by a patriotic program at the Polish National Alliance Hall. Various Colorado governors, Denver mayors and a host of political officials addressed these May 3rd celebrations over the years.

In 1908 Fr. Jarzynski launched a campaign to build a parish school. By 1914, however, he abandoned the idea because of a dispute involving his alleged mismanagement of parish funds; the \$2,000 collected was used to pay off the remaining parish debt. During most of his pastorate, Fr. Jarzynski also faced a separatist movement by Slovenian and Croatian parishioners to have their own church. They wrongly accused him of forcing them to always take the rear pews at St. Joseph's. Fr. Jarzynski initially opposed their petition for another church, since he rightly felt that Globeville did not have enough Slavonic Catholics to financially support another parish. By 1917, however, Fr. Jarzynski relented and Holy Rosary was built in 1919-20, a block away from St. Joseph's.

An excellent spiritual leader interested in the general welfare of his parishioners, Fr. Jarzynski participated in a number of community projects. In 1919, for example, he supported with the other clergymen of Globeville the construction of a community center for the benefit of the entire population comprising a number of different European ethnic groups. He also encouraged the establishment of the Polish Literary Club during World War I under parish auspices. Lasting about eight years, it served as both a social outlet for the younger parishioners and as an entertainment forum for the community. The group performed annually in the P.N.A. Hall plays written and published by Polish authors in the United States.

The Literary Club helped Fr. Jarzynski stage the first parish bazaar in June, 1922 to raise money for the sanctuary addition to the church contemplated eighteen years earlier. While they netted a profit of \$1,556.00, the anxiety and strain connected with it precipitated Fr. Jarzynski's death on June 14, 1922. His death marked the passing of a pioneer, builder-priest who had imparted much of his own character to the parish as its first pastor for twenty-two years. Fr. Jarzynski's funeral was held at St. Joseph's on June 19, with Bishop Henry Tihen of Denver officiating. Burial followed at Mt. Olivet cemetery in Denver.

Bishop Tihen immediately filled the vacancy left by Fr. Jarzynski's death by designating Rev. John Guzinski as the new pastor of St. Joseph's. Fr. Guzinski was already in the Denver diocese, having been chaplain since 1918 at the Novitiate of Our Lady of Mercy in Aurora. Born on September 20, 1888 in Montana, Wisconsin, Fr. Guzinski attended St. Stanislaus parish school in Winona, Minnesota, and SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. On June 25, 1914, Bishop P. R. Heffron ordained him at St. Mary's College in Winona for that diocese. Although initially stationed at St. Stanislaus in Winona, ill health prompted him to seek a more favorable climate out West. Before coming to Denver in the spring of 1916, he served briefly in Santa Fe, New Mexico and Tuscon, Arizona. In Colorado he was stationed alternately (prior to 1918) at St. Nicholas Hospital in Cripple Creek as chaplain, St. James Parish In Denver, and St. Victor's in Victor. In contrast to his predecessor, Fr. Guzinski represented the new generation of priests of Polish descent who were American-born and educated in the United States. He would serve almost uninterruptedly as pastor of St. Joseph's until his death in 1969.

Early in his pastorate, Fr. Guzinski completed the work initiated by his predecessor. In 1923 the church itself was enlarged, thanks largely to the proceeds from the parish bazaar held the previous year. When the work was finished and the church redecorated, St. Joseph's was rededicated by Bishop Tihen at a solemn pontifical mass on Sunday morning, February 11, 1923. The church was expectedly quite crowded with the various parish societies, including some from neighboring Holy

## Rosary in Attendance.

Fr. Guzinski then turned his attention to the construction of a parochial school, the last segment of the parish plant to be completed in accordance with the wishes expressed by its founder-members at the turn of the century. The colorful ground-breaking ceremony was held on Sunday, March 7, 1925, at the school site on 46th and Pearl Streets. The combination school-convent was completed by the summer of the following year at a cost of \$21,000. As such, it was the first Catholic parochial school to be built in that part of Denver. Sidney G. Frazier of Greeley drew the plans for the building, which featured the convent quarters and a large auditorium for two hundred on the first floor, and four large classrooms on the second story. The Denver Catholic Register noted, "The Denver Polish parish is not as large as many parishes of this nationality in the East and the people deserve the greatest credit for the sacrifices they have made in the building of the school." Dedicated by Bishop Tihen on September 4, 1926, St. Joseph's parochial school opened later that same month with eight grades and an enrollment of 151 pupils. It was staffed by five Sisters of St. Joseph, an order of chiefly Americanborn nuns of Polish descent with their motherhouse in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. Fr. Guzinski decided that no tuition would be charged and that the school would likewise be open to the children of nonparishioners.

The decade of the twenties, the most active years of Fr. Guzinski's pastorate, closed with the celebration in 1929 of the parish's twenty-fifth anniversary and the 150th anniversary of Brig. General Casimir Pulaski, the American Revolutionary War hero. The parish's silver jubilee, commemorated on October 23, 1927, with a solemn pontifical mass by Bishop Tihen, was recorded in a number of midwestern Polish newspapers. For example, *Nowiny Polskie* (Polish News) published since 1916 in St. Paul, Minnesota reported on the occasion in an article entitled, "Echa z dalekiego zachodu" - (An Echo from the Far West).

The thirties saw the staging by some thirty parishioners of an impressive mock Krakovian wedding on the parish grounds (August 18 and 19, 1935) to raise money for the parochial school. The event netted a profit of \$2,500, a tidy sum in the immediate post-Depression era. The decade closed with the celebration of Fr. Guzinski's silver jubilee as a priest on Sunday, June 25, 1939. It was not only the highpoint of his pastorate, but also an important event in the history of the parish, since it represented the last great gathering of its founder-members and their children. . . many of the former would pass away in the 1940's.

World War II, initiated by the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939, saw St. Joseph's parishioners active on behalf of Polish War Relief. They canvassed the Globeville area for donations and participated in a city-wide concert at West High School in 1940 for the benefit of the Polish War Victims Relief Committee. America's entry into the war in December 1941 elicited the enlistment of one-fifth of St. Joseph's male parishioners into various branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, while its female members were active in annual War Bond drives. Prior to the end of the war, the parish hosted receptions in 1943 for Dr. Władysław Sokołowski, Polish Consul General in San Francisco, and in 1944 for several Polish Pestki (WACS), who were enroute to London from the Far East.

1944 was also an important year for St. Joseph's as a parish. It witnessed not only the organ dedication ceremony in October, but the appointment by Archbishop Urban J. Vehr of Rev. Edward Fraczkowski as administrator of the parish. His presence was required during Fr. Guzinski's yearlong

hospitalization. A native of Wilmington, Delaware, Fr. Fraczkowski had attended St. John Kanty College in 1944-45 in Erie, Pennsylvania, and later Orchard Lake Seminary near Detroit where he was a classmate of the future John Cardinal Krol of Philadelphia. He completed his studies at St. Thomas Seminary in Denver and was ordained for the Denver diocese by then-Bishop Vehr on June 11, 1938. That same month he said his first mass at St. Joseph's. He was first assigned as assistant pastor at Holy Family parish in Denver, where he earned quite a reputation as director of its Boys' Club. "Fr. Fraz," as he was popularly known throughout the archdiocese, became quite active in parish affairs at St. Joseph's. He organized the students into several clubs and even taught at the parish school. During his four-year tenure the church interior was renovated. The Polish Harmony Club was organized as a young adult social group and a fund-raising arm of the parish.

The return of Fr. Guzinski from the hospital necessitated the transfer of Fr. Fraczkowski, since the parish was not large enough for both priests. When the Archbishop felt Fr. Guzinski was physically able to manage on his own, Fr. Fraczkowski became chaplain in 1948 at Penrose Hospital in Colorado Springs. The following year he was transferred to St. Mary's church in Rifle on Colorado's Western Slope where he served until 1960. In addition to St. Mary's itself, his responsibilities likewise encompassed farflung mission parishes, also on the Western Slope. During his eleven years in the mission field, Fr. Fraczkowski did much to expand the cause of the Catholic church locally on account of his engaging personality, initiative and flexible approach to organizational matters.

The period immediately following World War II signaled a transition for St. Joseph's. The composition of Globeville began to change as many of its second and third generation Americans of Polish descent gradually moved to new, developing residential areas in other parts of the city. The construction of the Valley Highway (today part of the 1-70 system) in the early 1950's practically cut the community in half and took away a number of parishioners' homes. At that time, too, the city attempted to rezone Globeville for non-residential use, but was successfully opposed by a groundswell of community protest. Nevertheless, despite the exodus of a number of families from St. Joseph's in the forties and fifties, the parish was sustained by the arrival of Polish displaced persons in Denver after World War II. Although many of them did not reside permanently in Globeville, most of them joined St. Joseph's. The parish performed for them a spiritual and social function analogous to that which it had played for the Polish immigrants and their children during the preceding two generations.

The last great effort of Fr. Guzinski's pastorate was the construction of the convent in 1964-65 for the Sisters of St. Joseph who continued to teach in the parochial school. While the parish had contemplated the convent from the outset, it was only able to financially realize the project in the mid-sixties. A building fund begun on Easter Sunday, 1959, following the liquidation of the parish debt, grew to the \$40,000 level by 1964, thanks to large donations by Archbishop Vehr and various families in the parish. The ground-breaking ceremony was held on Sunday, October 23, 1964, the feast of Christ the King. The Stopa Construction Company of Denver built the convent at a cost of \$56,000 on the basis of plans which had been drawn up by Mr. Henry Podzinski, a civil engineer and a parishioner. Four years later, on April 4, 1969, Fr. Guzinski died shortly before Easter. He had one of the longest pastorates at a single parish in the Denver Archdiocese.

Fr. Fraczkowski was installed as the third pastor of St. Joseph's on Sunday, June 29, 1969. In an

interview in the Rocky Mountain News, he described the position of the parish at the outset of the seventies:

*"We don't have any geographical boundaries. Anyone who is Polish may belong to our parish no matter where he lives in the Denver area. . . Our people still come back, especially for marriages, baptisms and funerals. They want to keep the old customs, and it means a lot to them to have these rites in the old church."*

Fr. Fraczkowski initiated a renovation of the parish plant. Toward this end he established the St. Joseph Memorial Fund to allow parishioners to help their parish now and in the future. He also struggled to keep the parochial school open. The task became increasingly difficult as operational costs soared as part of the general inflation in the early seventies. The school was eventually closed a few years later.

Fr. Fraczkowski died on November 19, 1973, while pastor of St. Joseph's. He was one of the best-known priests in the entire archdiocese. An outstanding tribute of esteem and affection by his parishioners and friends marked his funeral service. Following the Mass of the Resurrection at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral, a group of parishioners of St. Joseph's kept an all-night vigil prior to his burial at Mt. Olivet cemetery.

Fr. Fraczkowski's successor as pastor is Rev. Jan Mucha, S.C.J., a native of Nowy Targ, Poland. Ordained in Poland in 1954 by Bishop Karol Pekala, Fr. Mucha attended high school in Krakow and spent one year at the Novitiate of the Sacred Heart in Stadniki, followed by priestly studies at the Diocesan Seminary in Tarnow. During a trip to the United States to visit relatives in the winter of 1970, Fr. Mucha stopped in Denver and was asked to remain by a number of St. Joseph's Polish-speaking parishioners. On January 5, 1972, he was made Fr. Fraczkowski's assistant and subsequently in January, 1974 he was named administrator, a position he continues to hold.

Fr. Mucha has retained the previous schedule of an English and a Polish mass each Sunday and fostered the beautiful Polish customs surrounding the Christmas and Easter seasons. He has also reintroduced, after many years, and with the blessing of the local archdiocese, the annual Corpus Christi processions as a manifestation of community faith. In anticipation of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the parish this year, Fr. Mucha has continued the renovation of the church begun by his predecessor. Also, he has rented the old parish school building to the Denver public schools, and has made arrangements for the convent to be used as a home for the elderly.

With Fr. Mucha, St. Joseph's has completed a full cycle. It began with a pastor from the Plock region in partitioned Poland seventy-five years ago, and continued under two Polish-Americans who made important contributions to its history. Fr. Mucha, a part of the most recent immigration of priests from Poland to Catholic parishes in the United States, has renewed the Polish spirit of St. Joseph's, its *raison d'etre*. Like his predecessors, he effectively continues to reach out to all Catholics of Polish descent in the Denver archdiocese, with the message that the doors of St. Joseph's are always open as their spiritual home.

In anticipation of the centennial of the parish and the eventual transformation of Globeville into an industrial park, serious thought should be given to declaring the church itself an historical monument. St. Joseph's is the oldest remaining, identifiably Polish edifice in Colorado which was

built by the majority of the Polish community of the mass immigration and which has been in continuous use from the outset as a national parish. St. Joseph's historical value is enhanced by the fact that it belongs to a very few, Polish-related structures in the western half of the United States. The preservation of St. Joseph's would be a service to Denverites, Coloradoans and all Americans, whether or not of Polish descent, because it would visibly document the presence in western America of the Polish ethnic group, one of the nation's largest. The preservation of St. Joseph's as an historical monument would also accent the contribution of the Polish community, as one of a number of ethnic groups, to the development of Denver and Colorado.

Stanley L. Cuba