

A MESSAGE FROM FATHER CARMEN G. BOLOCK, PASTOR

Hello and welcome to St. Mary's Polish National Catholic Church in Duryea, PA. Myself and the Parish Family of St. Mary's are glad you stopped by today. You may be wondering who and what we are. Those are good questions if you are not familiar with our part of the Catholic Church.

Let me start by giving you a brief history of the Polish National Catholic Church and of our Parish. In the year 1896 a group of 250 Polish immigrants in the city of Scranton, PA found themselves in a bad situation as far as the practice of their Catholic faith and religious rights were in danger. They were poor mine workers who struggled to earn a small income to support themselves and their families; it was a very difficult time for them. With what little money they had they managed to support their families, and their Church. But, their efforts were not appreciated by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in that area.

Besides asking for more money by their pastor and reluctance of the Diocesan Bishop of Scranton to provide them with a priest of Polish descent, along with the fact they were denied a voice in the life of their Church, these poor folks were finding it difficult to remain faithful to a Church which did not seem to care about its people. There were also issues of the faith and the constant threats by the pastor of condemnation for not giving financial support. These brave and holy people decided to take matters into their own hands. Using their money and labor, they constructed a Church building of their own. When it came time for the bishop to come and consecrate the Church, he demanded that the title and deed to the property be turned over to his control, (In the Roman Catholic Church all property is in the control of the bishop of the Diocese). They found that to be unacceptable since the bishop had provided them with no money for the building of the Church. At that point they sought out the help of a Polish Priest in the area whom they knew and trusted to come and take up their cause.

A delegation of people traveled to the borough of Nanticoke, PA to seek out Father Francis J. Hodur, a Polish Priest whom they had known and explained to Father Francis their problem. Father Francis listened with great compassion and concern for what they were telling him. They asked him to come to Scranton and be the Pastor of St. Stanislaus' Church. After praying over their situation, Fr. Francis agreed to come and be their Pastor. And so the first Mass was celebrated in St. Stanislaus' Church on Christmas Eve.

Fr. Francis did not want to leave the situation as it was. He went to see the Bishop of Scranton to see if a solution could be worked out. He was given no hearing by the bishop, in fact Fr. Francis was told that the people were to cease what they were doing and that he was to return to his parish in Nanticoke. He decided to go to Rome, Italy (the center of the Roman Catholic Church) to speak to the Pope himself. Needless to say, he never even got to see the Pope. Rather, Fr. Francis was told by the aids to the Pope that the matter was closed and that he was to return to Scranton and go back to his previous parish. Upon his return, Fr. Francis received a letter from the bishop addressed to him and the members of St. Stanislaus' ordering them to stop what they were doing and turn the Church property over to the bishop or face Ex-Communication

from the Roman Catholic Church. Father read the letter to the people at Holy Mass. Fr. Francis and the people all agreed they could not return to a Church which was so unfeeling. Fr. Francis tore the letter and burned it in front of everyone. With that the Polish National Catholic Church emerged as a Church onto itself on the second Sunday of March 1897.

The work began to form a Catholic Church which was true to the ideals set by Jesus in the Gospel. A faith which was truly Catholic free of manmade dogmas, were the people had a voice in the operation of the Church. Soon the ideals of Fr. Francis and the people were being put into place. Mass was in a language people could understand and not in Latin. On Christmas Eve 1900 Mass was celebrated in Polish for the first time. Management of the material affairs of the Church was placed in the hands of the people of the parish, meaning they would be responsible for the financial area of the Church. The first Synod of the Church was held in 1904 with everyone clergy and laity having voice and vote in the affairs of their religious life. Fr. Francis was elected the first bishop of the Church. Soon this fresh idea of a new Religious Freedom spread far and wide. In 1907 Fr. Francis was Consecrated a Bishop for the Polish National Catholic Church in St. Gertrude's Cathedral, Utrecht Holland by the Bishops of the Old Catholic Church of the Union of Utrecht. In the fall of 1897 the Polish immigrants in Duryea learned of the heroic act of their fellow countrymen in Scranton had thrown off the bonds of oppression and organized the Polish National Catholic Church under Father Francis Hodur's leadership. In this town of six thousand the local Roman Catholic priest encouraged the people during Holy Mass to pray that those who had joined the Polish National Catholic Church would return to the faith of the Church of Rome. He also had leveled vicious verbal attacks against them. This upset many people at that Mass. One worshiper stood up and said that they should pray that God would free them as well from the slavery of the Roman Bishop.

A committee was organized and sent an invitation to Bishop Francis to come to Duryea. On October 23rd 1898 Bishop Francis came to Duryea and was greeted warmly. At that organizational meeting the first parish committee was elected, and began the task of constructing a church building & rectory along Stephenson Street. On April 10th 1899 a charter of incorporation was applied for in the Court of Common Pleas of Luzerne County. The papers were filed on August 10th 1899 and on September 12th 1899 the charter was approved and recorded. St. Mary's Polish National Catholic Church was born. The members of St. Mary's soon faced the same discrimination as the members of St. Stanislaus' were facing, but it did not dampen their spirit. Nor did the burning of the church in 1908 by an arsonist who was never arrested, or the burning of the Rectory in 1928. Each problem only served to strengthen the members of St. Mary's in their commitment and faith in God.