

By Stanislaw Czarnecki, SJ

**T**HE Polish Jesuits in Chicago are celebrating their 75th anniversary of service to the Polish community. Originally located in New York during the First World War, in 1934 the Polish Jesuits moved their central headquarters to Chicago—home to the second largest Polish population in the world next to Krakow—and established the Sacred Heart Mission House on the city’s northwest side. Their primary objectives were to establish a successful mission to serve Catholic Polish immigrants and continue publishing *Poslaniec* (The Polish Messenger of the Sacred Heart) magazine.

The Polish Jesuit mission statement reads: “to provide, under the guidance of Catholic priests, moral growth for men and women, propagate daily prayer among Catholics, inspire good deeds, to assist in building moral virtues, to provide knowledge of the teachings, history, liturgy and practices of the Catholic faith and to provide religious information through literature via the dissemination of books, periodicals and other publications with the same purpose and to provide suitable resources to accomplish this work.”

Over the past three-quarters of a century, nearly 100 Polish Jesuits in Chicago have lived out this mission by informing and inspiring Polish-American Catholics in the city and around the nation by publishing *Poslaniec*, preaching, offering Ignatian retreats and spiritual direction, organizing novenas, and conducting three-day church services known as the “40-hour devotions.”

When they moved to Chicago, the Polish Jesuits purchased a house on the city’s northwest side from a Polish family that was thrilled to help the cause. Initially, the



At age 41, Fr. Stanislaw Czarnecki (back row, center) is the youngest member of the Polish Jesuit Community serving the sacramental and spiritual needs of Polish Catholics in Chicago today. Community members include (front row) Fr. Piotr Kochanowicz, Fr. Mirosław Bozek, and Fr. Tadeusz Kukulka and (back row) Br. Adam Laska and Fr. Wiesław Faron.

# The Polish Jesuits

**SERVING CHICAGO'S IMMIGRANT POPULATION**

house served as a residence and administrative headquarters for the apostolic operations, but eventually it was opened to the public for celebrations of the Mass. Over time, Polish Catholics from all over Chicago flocked to the house for Mass and caused quite a spectacle. Eventually, the Polish Jesuits offered more than 10 Masses for more than 2,000 people each Sunday. Because the chapel was very small, the Jesuits set up closed-circuit televisions in the basement and corridors and placed speakers in the windows so overflow crowds could participate in the liturgies. It wasn't long before neighbors complained about the crowds and the noise!

As a result, we Polish Jesuits had to dream big for the new millennium. So in 2001 we bought a building (and parking lot) that would allow us to offer a wide range of worship, spiritual and cultural enrichment,

and service opportunities. Appropriately, we named it the Jesuit Millennium Center.

Since then we've renovated the building and now serve 4,500 people each weekend for Mass and hundreds upon hundreds of people during the week. Our parishioners come from nearby neighborhoods and far away suburbs, and include new immigrants, second- and third-generation Polish Americans, young families, middle-aged, and elderly people.

Today we take comfort in knowing that the Jesuit Millennium Center is well known as a safe, welcoming home for Polish Catholics. With the help of volunteers and benefactors, we offer a wide range of programs that fit into three main categories: religious, cultural, and social.

The main area of the Center is dedicated to the place of worship, the Shrine of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, where Masses are

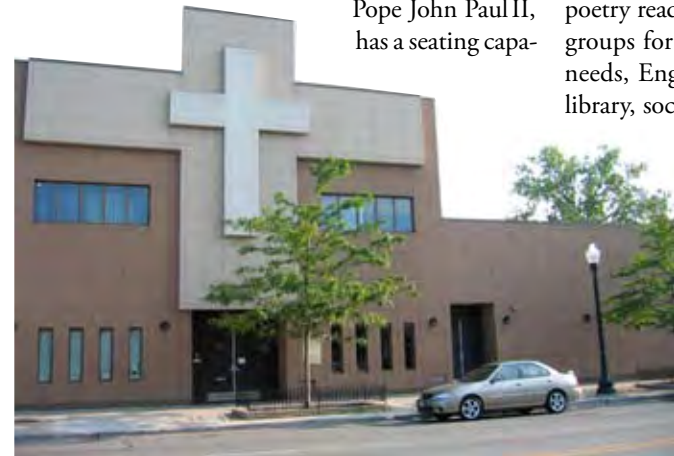


The Jesuit Millennium Center celebrates Polish Masses on a daily basis in the Shrine of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The mosaic on the wall behind the altar features three prominent Jesuits—St. Stanislas Kostka (far left), St. Andrew Bobola, and Fr. Peter Skarga (neither visible)—whose lives and witness serve as an inspiration to Polish Catholics the world over.

celebrated in the Polish language. Every day many Poles come to the Shrine to attend Mass, go to confession, and to receive Holy Communion. The Center also provides a library and an auditorium. The library, which was established at the original Jesuit residence, was relocated to the Jesuit Millennium Center to make it more accessible for its members. The auditorium, named after Pope John Paul II, has a seating capa-

city of 250 people and is used for many theatrical and cultural events, concerts, film festivals, symposiums, and other formal meetings that require this type of meeting space. The Center also provides a few smaller meeting rooms for groups to gather. On any given day, there's something here for everyone: Mass, confession, weddings, funerals, prayer services, spiritual direction, plays, poetry readings, concerts, meetings, support groups for those with addictions or special needs, English language courses, a lending library, social gatherings, sports for children, and service opportunities for everyone.

Jesus, in the mosaic behind the main altar of the Shrine, welcomes all of us with outstretched arms. He wants to hold each of us to close to His Heart and invites us to Him with these words: "Come to Me all who are labored and burdened, for I will refresh you." We welcome all of you to our Center and Shrine, we welcome you to visit the Polish Jesuits in Chicago. ■



The Jesuit Millennium Center, located at 5835 W. Irving Park Road, has served the Polish Catholic community since 2001. Today more than 4,500 Polish people attend Mass here each weekend.

For centuries, Poland's history and culture have been intertwined with the strong Catholic faith of its people. Over the past years, the Polish Province has provided a remarkable gift of assigning Jesuits to serve generations of Polish immigrants in Chicago by nurturing their faith and heritage. For the thousands of Chicago Polish people offered Mass and Polish Catholic culture each week and for the booming growth in Polish Jesuit vocations, we offer our sincere thanks and hearty congratulations—*sto lat!*

—Fr. Edward Schmidt, SJ,  
Provincial of the Chicago Province



When the Polish Jesuits moved from New York to Chicago in 1934, they purchased this house at 4105 N. Avers Avenue. From here, they have served Catholic Polish immigrants who flocked to the house for Mass. Eventually, after offering more than 10 Masses in the house for more than 2,000 people each Sunday, the Polish Jesuits purchased a nearby building and renovated it into the Jesuit Millennium Center.

For more information, please visit the Polish Jesuits at:



[www.jezuicichicago.org](http://www.jezuicichicago.org)