

# Poles find cultural home in 100-year-old parish

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — For the people of St. Stanislaus Parish, the word "solidarity" connotes two ideas. The first of these is the name of a political party that represents Poland's rejection of Soviet-imposed communism.

More subtly, "solidarity" is also what has held St. Stanislaus together through its 100 years of existence. The parish's 800 families, 80 percent of whom claim Polish origin, have through the years attempted to keep alive their Polish customs, traditions and language.

Every Sunday at 11:30 a.m., Father Andrew Grzela, pastor, celebrates Mass in his native tongue.

Father Grzela, who left his homeland in 1973, noted that although the liturgy is in Polish, recent immigrants are not accustomed to some of its features, including the use of lay eucharistic ministers.

"They have enough priests in Poland," said Father Grzela, who has been pastor since 1981. "In most of the villages, the priest is like God. He does everything. He preaches. He tells them how much money to bring in. It's not like here where we have involvement of the laity."

Just as the U.S. church is different from its Polish counterpart, so is the culture to which the parish has helped many of its older parishioners successfully adjust, Father Grzela said. "They are not able to understand English. They don't follow American traditions. They stick to Polish traditions. They need us for their confessions."

About one-third of the parish's Poles are immigrants, many of them senior citizens. St. Stanislaus saw an influx of younger Poles in the early 1980s, when the parish's Aid to Newcomers program resettled 40 to 60 new families that had fled Poland, noted Maria Przewdziecki, a parishioner since 1980.

Przewdziecki and her husband, Wojtek, were both children when they and thousands of others fled Poland during World War II. Poland suffered a similar



Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier  
Father Andrew Grzela (second from right) talks with parishioners at a cocktail party following the Bobby Vinton concert at the Eastman Theater Saturday, Sept. 16. Proceeds from the concert will help defray the cost of the parish's centennial celebration over the next year.

exodus when martial law was imposed in 1981 and the trade union Solidarity was banned.

Working with several other parishioners, the Przewdzieckis coordinated the aid program, which helped Polish refugees referred by the Catholic Family Center to find housing, welfare and employment in the Rochester area. The Przewdzieckis had been members of a Pittsford parish, but left it to work for their fellow Poles. "We felt we had to show our solidarity

with the Polish people at that time," Maria said.

St. Stanislaus' role in the Rochester community also impressed the couple, Wojtek said, noting, "I don't think it was the Polish Mass as much as (the fact that St. Stanislaus) was the center of the Polish community" that attracted him and his wife.

Aid to Newcomers no longer exists, but many parishioners remain interested in the welfare of their fellow Poles, remarked Gabriela Jaskot, who left Poland in 1926 and joined the parish in 1927 when she was 17.

Jaskot said a cousin who still lives in Poland told her, "There are shortages of everything you can mention." To help alleviate those shortages, "everybody's sending packages" to Poland, she said. In the past, the parish has held fundraisers for the Polish American Congress, a Washington, D.C., relief organization that sends

food and medical supplies to Poland, Jaskot commented.

Here in Rochester, Jaskot has directed the parish's Polish dancing groups since 1945. Two groups — consisting of children 6 to 10 and young adults 18 to 22 years of age — meet weekly at the parish for Jaskot's dance lessons, which are flavored by short lessons in Polish history. Running the dance groups is Jaskot's way of resisting the pressures of Americanization on the parish's Poles.

"Dancing ... was the only way to keep the customs of the homeland," she noted. "Without music and dancing, (the students) don't want to listen to the lessons."

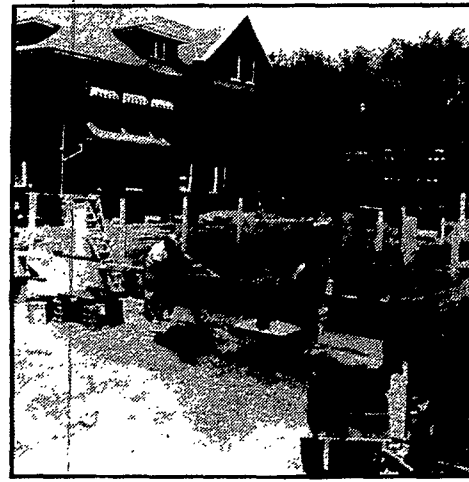
The parish also sponsors a Polish language school for children and adults on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Father Grzela said. Last year, 40 students attended classes, he said.

Fluency in Polish is an indispensable asset for parish secretary Vicki Cetner, whose family joined St. Stanislaus about 20 years ago after moving from Poland to the United States. "Every day, you have to speak Polish," Cetner said, noting that she receives five or six calls a day from Po-

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Courier File Photo  
In this 1940 picture, Bishop James E. Kearney (center) guides a procession through the parish, which was celebrating its 50th anniversary.



Workers lay brick for an addition to St. Stanislaus Church in this 1958 photo.

## Organizers plan reunion for school in Brooklyn

Organizers planning a reunion for the Class of 1940 at St. Brendan's Grammar School in Brooklyn are seeking members of the class. The gala is tentatively scheduled for January, 1990.

For information, contact: Leo Halley, 1750 Kimball St., Brooklyn, N.Y., 11234; Frank Lorenzo, 2477 Loft Ave., Baldwin, N.Y. 11510; or Joan E. Flynn, 1347 E. 16th St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11230.



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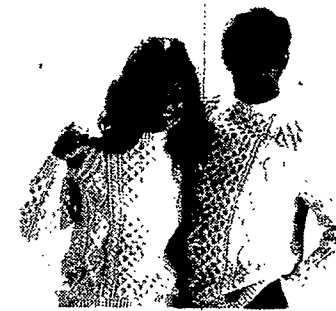
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