



Polish parishes and churches in the United States of America

Research Project



Research project of *the Research Center of Polish Migration and Immigrant Pastoral Care of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin* (KUL), implemented by *the Society of Friends of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin* and co-financed with the funds of the Program of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage *Protection of Cultural Heritage Abroad*.

The main patrons of the project are the Deputy Prime Minister, Prof. Piotr Gliński - Minister of Culture and National Heritage and Bishop Wiesław Lechowicz Ph.D.- Delegate of the Polish Episcopate Commission for the Pastoral Care of Polish Emigration.

In 2016, we celebrated the 1050th anniversary of the baptism of Poland. Among the valuable initiatives, including scientific ones, showing the fundamental contribution of Christianity to the development of Polish culture and the process of shaping the national consciousness of Poles, an initiative was taken to show the fruits of this phenomenal relationship between Christianity and Polish identity affecting the spiritual and cultural heritage of the world.



A beautiful and little-known episode in this history is the contribution of Poles to the development of the Catholic Church in the United States. Our compatriots who emigrated overseas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, among the basic needs they wanted to satisfy in new places of settlement, often put first the possession of a "Polish" church in order to be able to carry out religious observances in the native atmosphere of Marian cult as well as the cult of the saints venerated

in their homeland. These places, permeated with the Polish confessional, historical and linguistic perspectives, became as it were automatically local "embassies" of free Poland.

In this element of multinational emigration processes in the United States, our fellow countrymen left a lot of material traces of spiritual and culture-forming life that are fundamental for the national pride of Poland and the United States. Poles settling in the United States, regardless of historical circumstances, created over 800 pastoral centers, by erecting several hundred new churches and leaving many traces of Polishness in the churches that had already existed. These parishes and churches became important centers of national culture and education because, apart from beautiful churches, schools and local centers of Polish culture were built and run as attached to them. An example of the scale and uniqueness of this activity are, for instance nearly 50 so-called Polish cathedrals. Recently, one of them – St. John Cantius





church in Chicago, as part of the Church Madness 2016 competition was considered the most beautiful church in the USA.

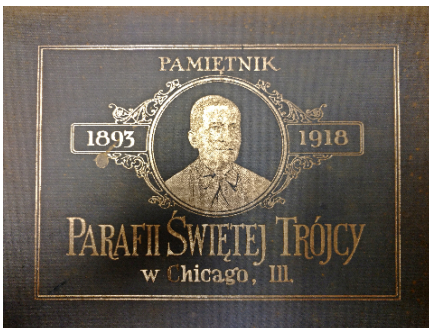
In recent years, as a result of a decrease in the inflow of Poles to the US and at the same time intensification of internal migration, many of these parishes and churches

have passed into the hands of Spanish-speaking Catholics or have definitely been closed. Therefore, there is an urgent need to describe these communities immediately and an in-depth inventory of the buildings - including securing different categories of archival material and creating an "oral history" database concerning these issues, and then drawing up this multidimensional documentation and making it available to a wide audience in a printed and electronic form. To achieve this goal, we have prepared IT tools that will facilitate the collection of these multi-layered data. However, people are an irreplaceable link in this undertaking, with particular regard for the priests of our compatriots, who act as substantive coordinators in the individual dioceses of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The first stage of the project refers to churches in the "Polish Cathedrals" category.



We are convinced that the project researchers who have several decades' experience in this area (e.g. The geographical and historical lexicon of parishes and Polish churches in Canada, ed. E. Walewander, vol.1-2, Lublin 1992-1993) and the professional research

team guarantee a reliable effect of the effort that will result in the raising the awareness of the widest possible audience how huge a spiritual, civilizational and cultural contribution has been made by our countrymen, whose fate has become a part of the history of the United States.



In December 2017, the first stage of the project "Polish parishes and churches in the USA" was completed. The work of an 8-person team of researchers from the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Paweł Sieradzki Ph.D.), Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (Prof. Katarzyna Chrudzimska-Uhera, Prof. Anna Sylwia Czyż, Bartłomiej Gutowski Ph.D.), as well as historians and sociologists from the USA (Sr. Genowefa Potaczala MChr, Rev. Stanisław Flis Ph.D.) is headed by Prof. Jacek Gołębiowski. They have carried out a detailed photographic and source inventory of 22 parishes from the "Polish Cathedrals" category, located in the Chicago metropolis. It encompassed the most valuable parishes and churches, among others: St. Stanislaus Kostka, Holy Trinity, St. John Cantius, Our Lady of the Angels, St. Barbara, St. Michael the Archangel, etc.



It is difficult to believe that these huge and richly decorated churches were built by emigrants who came to America "to earn their bread." The number of parishioners, reaching even from 10 to 40 thousand, and the number of associations and fraternities, operating at one parish often exceeding 100 organizations, illustrates the scale of our compatriots' involvement in religious life and maintaining Polishness abroad. The preservation of the Polish language and the Catholic faith have been the foundation holding the Polish diaspora together.



The results of the first stage of the work were presented during two scientific conferences organized at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin/KUL (1 December 2017) and at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw/UKSW (8 December 2017). They were accompanied by an exhibition of photographs depicting the beauty of the "Polish Cathedrals" by Norbert Piwowarczyk, a photographer cooperating with the team of researchers. All the set goals have been accomplished. Thanks

to the support of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, a number of valuable source material related to the existence and activity of particularly important centers of Polish culture in Chicago have been secured through digitization. In addition, thanks to a photographic inventory, several thousand photographs have been obtained. The photographs illustrate the architecture and design of sacred buildings, schools and cemeteries.



The information concerning the effects of the research is constantly being updated on the website dedicated to Polish parishes and churches in the United States: **kosciolypolskiewusa.com**. A detailed inventory that has been made will enable further scientific research which will result in monographs, syntheses, lexicons and albums presenting the impressive achievements of Polish culture in the United States.

A fruitful continuation of the extensive research mentioned above is possible if the Polish community in the United States join it through help in obtaining archival material related to the history of Polish parishes (manuscripts, archival photographs, jubilee books of parishes and priests, guest books). The financial support is also indispensable for the development of this research project. Therefore we would like to encourage institutional sponsors as well as private individuals to support it.



Researchers Team

From left: Bartłomiej Gutowski Ph.D., prof. Katarzyna Chrudzimska-Uhera, Sr. Genowefa Potaczała MChr M.A., prof. Anna Czyż, prof. Jacek Gołębiowski – head of the project, Norbert Piwowarczyk M.A., Paweł Sieradzki Ph.D.

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