

History of St. Ladislaus Parish

One hundred and twenty-five years have passed since our ancestors formed the Parish of St. Ladislaus. Founded on the love of Our Lord, a faith-filled, worshipping community was established. The building which stands was built 115 years ago and symbolizes the trials of faith, love, and labor of all St. Ladislaus past and present.

Early known as the St. Ladislaus Congregation of Pike Lake, Marathon County, Wisconsin, the congregation was officially recognized as a parish on March 15, 1886 by Father Grabowski and residents of the area then known as the town of Pike Lake. The township was later divided into the present towns of Bevent and Reid.

The origin parishioners of St. Ladislaus were mostly immigrants from Poland who struggled with financial burdens and making a living in a country where a language barrier was an added handicap. Still, their determination united them as a parish. This young, faith-filled community erected a small frame building in 1882 which served as a Catholic Church. This later became a grocery store. A parsonage was also built in 1882 which was later moved when a new rectory was built. Members of the rapidly growing parish soon overflowed the original frame structure and within a few years they found it necessary to build the enlarged Church which stands on the present site in Bevent.

Members of this young parish, not being financially endowed, realized that building costs had to be kept to a minimum. Our ancestors gave of themselves most generously by doing the labor with their own hands.

Construction began in 1895 under the direction of Fr. Romuald Maggott, who came to St. Ladislaus Parish in November of that year. Disaster threatened the proposed new materials for the structure, however, even before construction was completely finished.

The men were working at nearby Crooked Lake cutting timbers for the new Church. The beams that still support the Church were hand-hewn, as were the joists, which also had to be sawed through the center by manpower with cross-cut saws. These timbers were hauled, with back-breaking human labor to the proposed site from Crooked Lake. A brush fire which swept the area threatened their hard work. Together, parishioners fought by hand against the fire, using buckets of water, in a desperate effort to save their Church building.

The Church still stands as the highest point around, over-looking the area. The total cost was \$15,000 when it was completed in 1896. The building was brick veneered in 1926 during the tenure of Fr. Francis Pudlo. Fr. Pudlo died the following year and was buried in the parish cemetery.

Following completion of the new Church, the original frame structure was used as a parochial school until 1914, then became a store in Bevent. The present parochial school was built in 1913 during the pastorate of Fr. Ignatius Mordarski. No Sister teachers were available, so lay personnel educated the parish children during the first nineteen years. The student body numbered approximately eighty children in the

day school. On Friday afternoons, up to 186 children from the public school attended Religion Classes at St. Ladislaus School.

Here are some of the many First Communion Classes at Bevent.

(pictures)

The people of St. Ladislaus, though poor and simple, were kind, good-hearted, and generous. Their Church was important to them. From the beginning of the parish, the people of the parish had an active St. Ladislaus Men's Society and Rosary Society. The Young Ladies' Sodality came into being in 1930. A faculty of Felician Sisters took over the operation of the school in 1932 when Fr. F. J. Brzostowicz was the resident pastor.

In May, 1935, sparks from the chimney ignited a fire on the school rood. Nearby farmers again created a water-bucket relay system by which they put out the fire. The building was saved, but suffered extensive damage.

Expanded needs of the school prompted an addition during the tenure of Fr. Peter Rombalski, who had come to Bevent in 1936. In his ardent desire to offer as much Catholic education as possible for the parish children, he added Grade 9 (1938) and Grade 10 (1939) to St. Ladislaus Catholic School.

Other improvements completed during Fr. Rombalski's term included a new tabernacle in the main altar and a new heating system. Dedication to Our Lord and to the parish was demonstrated many times over as parishioners worked together on improvements to meet the needs of the parish community. During Fr. Rombalski's pastorate, parishioners banded together to excavate and build a modern hall in the basement of the Church structure.

Pioneers of St. Ladislaus also extended their labor of love beyond the parish by building Crosses and religious shrines at crossroads in the area. This continues an old custom from Europe and some of these wayside shrines were even imported from Poland.

In 1944, Fr. John Krasowski was appointed pastor of St. Ladislaus Parish. He was an avid promoter of vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life. There was a significant increase in the number of young women from the parish seeking membership with the Felician Sisters.

The interior of the Church was renovated in the year 1951. The old wall board was removed and the walls plastered. A new style of arching was installed at this time. A new floor covering was laid in asphalt tiling in the Church proper. Rubber tile created a beautiful design in the sanctuary. All the altars were redecorated along with the statuary and new pews were installed. New lighting fixtures and Stations of the Cross were donated by various members of the parish. Both sacristies were also remodeled, as was the Church hall.

In the school year of 1956-1957, only three Felician Sisters returned to teach. Because there only twelve students registered for high school, the new pastor, Fr. Florian Marmurowicz, with Diocesan approval, closed that segment of the Parochial School at St. Ladislaus. Students then enrolled in neighboring public high schools.

Since Fr. Marmurowicz was ill for some time, he turned in his resignation to Bishop Frederick Freking on October 3, 1968. On October 11, eight days later, Fr. Marmurowicz was found lying dead in the rectory.

Fr. Bernard Nowak became pastor of St. Ladislaus Parish in 1968. During his 22 years here, a number of changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council were gradually implemented. The laity were slowly asked to assume greater responsibility for all aspects of parish life, including Liturgical Ministries such as Ministers of the Word and Eucharist. The beginnings of a Finance Council were put in place with the money counters acting in an advisory capacity. An annual appreciation party was initiated as a way of showing gratitude and support to all who donated their time and talent to the parish.

Due to declining enrollment, St. Ladislaus School was closed on June 9, 1969 and the Convent on June 20, 1969. The school was remodeled and a Religious Education Program expanded to meet the needs of parish youth in grade school and high school.

Many other improvements were also made to the physical plant during Fr. Nowak's tenure. The Communion railing was removed, new lighting installed, and a pipe organ, acquired from St. Mary's Hospital, installed when the Church was repainted and carpeted. An addition was added to the southeast corner of the Church, with a ramp which provided handicap access to the Church, and a chair lift provided handicap access to the basement. Other improvements included: paneling the Church hall, expanding, leveling, and blacktopping the parking lot, remodeling the rectory, and enhancing the appearance of the cemetery and grounds. A beautiful outdoor grotto of Our Lady of Fatima was erected from statues acquired from the former St. Mary's Hospital.

Work on the cemetery and grounds continued, as every year numerous repairs were made and more and more flowers added to beautify the grounds.

With Fr. Nowak's retirement in 1990, a new direction in parish leadership was initiated at St. Ladislaus Parish. Because of the Priest shortage in the Diocese, as well as throughout the country, St. Ladislaus became one among a growing number of parishes to share a pastor with another parish and obtain a resident pastoral associate. Fr. Herbert Zoromski, native son of Galloway, assumed pastorate of St. Ladislaus Parish, Bevent, along with St. Joseph Parish, Galloway, with residence in Galloway. Sr. Mary Ellen Diermeier, SSJ-TOSF, was appointed by Bishop John Paul to be resident Pastoral Associate of St. Ladislaus Parish. This appointment of a Sister as Pastoral Associate, also marked a pioneering venture in the Church of the 90's.

Under the leadership of Fr. Zomorski and Sr. Mary Ellen, many of the directions and recommendations of the Fourth Synod of the Diocese of La Crosse, held in 1986, were carried out. New life surged into St. Ladislaus Parish. The Parish Advisory and Finance Councils and their Committees were formed and became active in the parish. The Religious Education Program expanded to include all ages – preschool

through adult. Many more lay people became involved as new ministries emerged at St. Ladislaus and parishioners of all ages were called into fuller participation in Liturgy and parish life.

Realizing the need for an improved learning environment for Religion classes, as well as the need to conserve energy and reduce fuel bills, the CCD center was completely remodeled. New furnaces were installed in the Church, CCD center, and rectory.

Again the dedication and talent of the parishioners was revealed as they worked together to refresh the interior of the Church: cleaning, painting, repairing the altars, and replacing carpeting. A storage building and walk-in cooler in the Church kitchen were constructed by the Men's and Rosary Societies to accommodate ever growing parish events. A real tribute to the commitment of the people of St. Ladislaus Parish was the way they successfully revived the parish picnic and fostered a growing sense of community in doing so. In 1995 a parish Youth Group was also started.

In July, 1995, Father Joseph Diermeier (brother of Sr. Mary Ellen) succeeded Fr. Zoromski, who retired to his native Galloway, remaining in the area and helping out as needed. Fr. Joe Diermeier's spirituality was evident in his presence and in his celebration of the Liturgy and Sacraments. His love for music touched the hearts of the young and the "young at heart."

In August, 1996, Fr. Rex Zimmerman, assumed duties as pastor of St. Joseph, Galloway and St. Ladislaus, Bevent. He served the parish well for 14 ½ years, retiring to his native Stevens Point on March 1, 9011.

Many improvements were made and programs initiated between 1996 and 2011, including the construction of new Church addition with handicapped accessibility and an elevator, the renovation of the Church kitchen and a face lift for the hall, expansion of the cemetery and new grottos added, a new altar was built using part of the original Communion rail. St. Ladislaus Parish adopted a "sister parish" in Kentucky, and began a yearly celebration of Wedding Anniversaries, monthly senior citizen gatherings, a yearly pilgrimage, a Candle Lighting Memorial Service, Lenten Soup Suppers, a Vacation Bible School, a "Jesus Lives Celebration", women's, youth, and parish retreats, Mornings of Adoration, and an active youth ministry.

On July 1, 2011 Fr. Gus Bentil was assigned parochial administrator of St. Ladislaus Parish and the parishioners are looking forward to many good years of working with Fr. Bentil.

Many changes have taken place over the past 125 years of St. Ladislaus history. Many more changes will occur in the years ahead. One thing remains constant through it all: the love of God in Christ Jesus. The past, present, and future are all in God's hands. Faith, trust, perseverance, and sacrifice have brought St. Ladislaus Parish into being and we hand on those qualities to our children to preserve faith life in future generations. As we approach the future, we need not be reluctant. Our history proves we are a people led by God. blessed by Jesus, and filled with the Holy Spirit!

(Note: Information for this article obtained from: *Times Review*. 1954 Edition, *Felician Sisters Archives*, and *St. Ladislaus Archives File*. Also, assistance received from the *Stevens Point Buyer's Guide*).