

St Mary Our Lady Queen of Poland Parish
Thunder Bay, Ontario. Canada



Roy H. Piovesana

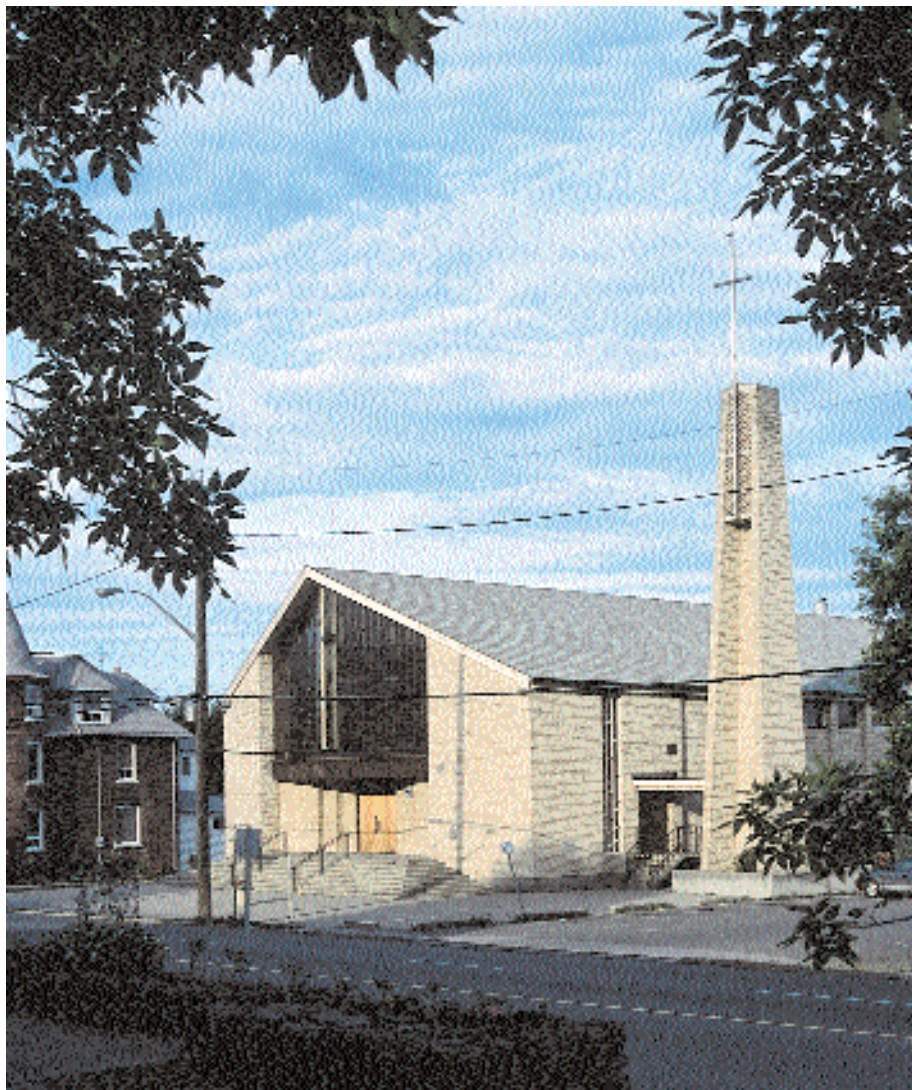


Photo: Roy Piovesana

The initiative for the creation of a national Polish parish in what was then the City of Port Arthur came from The Most Rev. E.Q. Jennings, Bishop of Fort William. He was aware of the growing number of Polish immigrants who had settled in Port Arthur after the Second World War and who preferred to practise their Roman Catholic faith in a parish with a distinct Polish ethos and under the spiritual leadership of a Polish-speaking pastor. Bishop Jennings responded to this need in the autumn of 1955 by inviting the Missionary Fathers of La Salette to lead the Polish Catholics of Port Arthur in parish formation and in the construction of a new church.

MISSIONARY FATHERS OF LA SALETTE

The La Salette Fathers were ideally suited to this task. This order of missionary priests was founded in 1852 by Philibert de Bruillard, Bishop of Grenoble, France. In 1893, they established a presence in the United States and by the mid-1950s their seminaries in Olivet, Illinois and Milwaukee, Wisconsin were graduating talented multi-lingual priests of Polish extraction.

REV. FATHER PETER JAWORSKI, M.S.

One such priest was Peter A. Jaworski, M.S. Father Jaworski was well-known among western Canadian Bishops as a former “efficient and energetic pastor of the Blessed Virgin Queen of Poland Parish in Beausejour, Manitoba. Later, as Provincial of the La Salette Missionary Fathers, he was responsible for the placement of several members of his community in the Red Lake area when parishes were developed in the towns of Red Lake and Balmertown during the early 1950s. Bishop Jennings was fortunate therefore, in enticing this priest to Port Arthur. “It is our hope”, wrote Bishop Jennings to the Polish people of Port Arthur, “that Father Jaworski will organize and direct Polish Catholics in a united effort for the founding of a fervent and progressive congregation which will eventually have its own church edifice...” Father Jaworski arrived in Port Arthur on December 6, 1955 and temporarily resided with Father Montag at Our Lady of Loretto Parish Rectory on Grenville Avenue, Port Arthur. He celebrated Christmas Eve Midnight Mass that year at Branch 19, Polish Alliance of Canada Hall, 103 South Court Street. For the next ten years, this hall became the temporary quarters for Our Lady Queen of Poland religious services.

A NATIONAL POLISH PARISH IN PORT ARTHUR

As its first pastor, Father Jaworski's daunting task was to create a sense of belonging to a national Polish parish among the approximately 800 Polish-speaking Roman Catholics of Port Arthur. Prior to his arrival many were members of other parishes in the city. In fact, a few families made the long trek each Sunday to attend mass at St Casimir's (Polish) Church in Fort William's East End. Others believed that since they were married in a particular church they were therefore obliged to continue to support it. It took time for these families to switch their loyalties to a new parish. And when they did, they discovered tension between the parish building committee and the pastor over whose responsibility it was to lead the congregation in fundraising and church construction. In 1958 for example, Father Jaworski lamented to Bishop Jennings that all finances for the building campaign were in the hands of the parish committee. His untimely death a year later, prevented him from witnessing any progress toward the creation of unified Polish parish in Port Arthur.

ST MARY OUR LADY QUEEN OF POLAND CHURCH, 1965

The appointment of Father Joseph Ferus, M.S. as administrator of the parish to succeed Father Jaworski gave Bishop Jennings an opportunity to renew the moral and financial support of the Diocese to the new Polish parish. In August of 1960, the Diocese contributed \$24,000 from the Bishop's Development Fund towards the purchase of property on which the new church would be built. That same month, Bishop Jennings made an unprecedented "Declaration of Intention" that the Bishop of the Diocese would in perpetuity confide St Mary Our Lady Queen of Poland Parish to "priests of Polish ethnic origin and language." Within five years of this pronouncement, through normal Sunday collections, regular monthly bingo, pierogi and cabbage roll sales by St Mary's Guild, and a significant bank loan, construction was completed on the new church at 93 North Algoma Street. It was officially dedicated by Bishop E.Q. Jennings on Sunday, 22 August 1965 in time to commemorate the first millennium of the Polish nation (966-1966). Nine years later, Father Joseph Gurka, M.S. informed Bishop Norman Gallagher that the church debt of \$250,000 had been paid. "This required" wrote Father Gurka 'lots of blood and sweat' and hard work on the part of many."

St Mary's Our Lady Queen of Poland Parish

List of Pastors (1956 – 2005)

Rev. Peter Jaworski, M.S.
(1956 – 1962)

Rev. Joseph Ferus, M.S.
(1960 – 1962)

Rev. Thad Galuszka, M.S.
(1963 – 1965)

Rev. Joseph Gurka, M.S.
(1965 – 1981; d. 16 October 1988)

Rev. Thaddeus Plawny, M.S.
(1982 – 1991)

Rev. Andrzej Werner, OF.M., Conv.
(1991– 2004)

Rev. Ireneusz Stadler
(2005 –)