

50 years of pastoral work by the Society of Christ in Australia.

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Translated into English by George Klim

The Polish community in Australia is one of the youngest Polish diasporas in the nation's history, if not the youngest. Previously people were migrating to countries in Western Europe, and to North and South America. The first arrivals in Australia from Poland came in small numbers at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. It was not until the mass migration caused by World War 2, which brought a seventy-thousand-strong group of Poles to Australia, the last continent discovered and recorded on world maps. It is difficult to say what motivated Polish migrants, who left for Australia or New Zealand in the 19th century. After all, in those times the distances covered were astronomical and knowledge of those places was rather fragmentary. It is possible that agents of migration companies used the ignorance of people determined to look for a place for a better life and transported them into the unknown.

The story of Polish World War 2 veterans was somewhat different. They had met Australians as comrades in arms on various fronts and they gained a justifiably good impression of them. The majority of the last wave of Polish migration to Australia during the nineteen eighties of the 20th century claimed that this country is 20 thousand kilometres away from the Soviet Union and it just has to be safe here. In any case, in those years Australia was a veritable Eldorado by comparison with the first years after World War 2. Each of these migration waves was accompanied by priests. The first one was Father Leon Rogalski, a Jesuit from the Polish territory annexed by Austria, who came to take care of the religious life of Poles - migrants from the part of Poland annexed by Prussia. Later on, there were the military chaplains, former concentration camp prisoners and missionaries from China, who had been forced to leave that country.

The first priests from the Society of Christ for Poles Abroad arrived in Australia in 1959. However the first contact of that congregation with the Polish community in Australia occurred many years earlier. It is worth mentioning it here. It happened in 1935. A Polish airman, Major Karpinski, came to Potulice near Bydgoszcz, the monastic home of the Society of Christ. This was shortly before the first flight of a Polish aeroplane to Australia. He was directed to fly there by Cardinal Hlond, whom the major had visited to ask for the primate's blessing prior to the flight. In Potulice he met young Society priests, who were preparing for future pastoral work among Polish migrants. During the meeting major Karpinski mentioned that he was carrying a letter from Cardinal Hlond to the Polish community in Australia. This was its exact text: *"A letter to the beloved Polish community in Australia! One of the aces of Polish aviation is winging his way towards you. May his hands, which guide the Polish aerial machine, convey to you my affectionate greetings, which I am sending to you as the Primate of Poland. When you welcome Major Karpinski, honour through him and his brave deed your great Polish homeland, your nation, whose children you are, your country, which arose again for you as well, thanks to Divine Providence. Turn your thoughts and your souls towards Czestochowa and your little churches at home, turn your souls towards Gniezno, Wawel and the Royal Castle in our Capital City. May your souls experience a strong revival of all that is ours, familiar and Polish, and Catholic in the Polish way. Enjoy meeting the heroic knight of the air, whose brave aerial adventure brought him to you. He represents a Poland, that believes in God, prays, works, builds and conquers. And tell us here in the old country*

everything that you would want to tell us. May God and my heartfelt blessing be with you. August Cardinal Hlond".

24 years had passed since the letter was written, a letter which indicated how extensively Cardinal Hlond cared for his countrymen, when the first priests from the congregation founded by him arrived in Australia. In May 1958 Archbishop Jozef Gawlina - who became protector of Polish migrants after Primate Hlond's death in 1948 - visited Polish centres in Australia. In conclusion he conferred with the Migration Commission of the Australian Episcopate, whose secretary was Monsignor Crennan. During this conference he convinced the bishops of the need to bring more Polish priests to work among the Polish community in Australia. On the 20th of May 1958 he communicated the result of these talks by letter to Father Ignacy Posadzy, who was the General Superior of the Society of Christ at that time. He reported that in Australia "a number of priests, who are in danger of physical exhaustion and illness, will have to be replaced by new ones, and, in addition, a number of friars will be recalled from Australia. In this situation there will be a need not for 7, but for 17 priests from the Society of Christ, and I informed Monsignor Crennan accordingly". Thus, thanks to Divine Providence and the intervention of Bishop J. Gawlina with the Australian Episcopate, the priests of the Society of Christ were soon able to depart on the long trip to the fifth continent.

The first priests of the Society of Christ, who arrived in Sydney on the 3rd of September 1959, were Father Edmund Gagajek as the Father Superior and Father Jozef Gula. Father Edmund Gagajek joined the Society of Christ in 1936. He was ordained in Cracow in 1943. After the end of the war he studied history at the Jagiellonian University. From 1949 until his departure for Australia he lectured in Church history at the Tertiary Seminar of the Society of Christ. After arriving in Sydney he introduced himself to Monsignor Crennan, who nominated him as the migrant priest for Poles, with the official title of "Chaplain". In addition, he was nominated as chaplain of the Sisters of Mercy in Sans Souci, where he also went to live. At a conference with Father Arciszewski and Father Mackowiak, who were then the priests for the Polish community in Sydney, he was entrusted with serving three suburbs: Bankstown, Revesby and Chullora. On the 8th of November 1959 he began his pastoral work in Revesby, and on the 15th of November in Bankstown. A year after his arrival Father Gagajek made an entry in his journal: *"The Church, shared church services, are an important factor in the strengthening of social ties. I know cases from the Revesby and Bankstown area, where at the first church services meetings occurred between Poles who came together and met for the first time after being neighbours in the same suburb for ten years and not knowing about each other's existence. [...] Attendance at Holy Mass in Bankstown is between 250 and 400 persons. At Easter there could have been 700".*

Father Jozef Gula, who was born in 1926, joined the Society of Christ shortly after World War 2. He was ordained in the Poznan Cathedral in 1953. He worked as a priest for six years at the then Gorzow diocese. After arriving in Australia he was given the task of pastoral care in the area of the Maitland diocese. For the first few weeks he lived at the residence of Bishop Toohey. In October 1959 he moved to Cardiff and lived at the local presbytery. Father Gula conducted church services for Poles in South Cardiff, Hamilton, Greta Camp and Maitland. This is how it all began.

From August 1961 Father Edmund Gagajek moved into his own home at 8 De Witt Street in Bankstown. This house was home to the priests of the Society of Christ until a house, which was appropriate for the needs of monastic and pastoral work, was built at 4 Little Road. in

Bankstown. The benefit of having one's own home became evident already during the first month. On the 28th of August 1961 a third priest of the Society of Christ arrived in Australia. It was Father Alfons J. Baranowski. There was no problem in finding accommodation for the new priest.

After the departure from Australia of Fr Arciszewski, the Polish chaplain in Ashfield, his duties were taken over by Fr Baranowski on the 3rd of December 1961. He replaced Fr Arciszewski also in the position of deputy president of the Polish Children's Home Committee in Marayong.

The year 1962 brought an unusual gift to the Polish community in Australia from Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński: a picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa, which peregrinated through all Polish centres during the preparations for the Millennium celebrations of the Baptism of Poland. Meanwhile the priests of the Society of Christ continued to extend their activities. Father J. Gula delivered the Lenten retreat in Western Australia and Fathers E. Gagajek and A. Baranowski became known throughout Sydney. The summer camps for altar boys, organised by Father Edmund, became extremely popular. On the 12th of October 1962 Fr. Wacław Mackowiak, a Dominican priest serving the Polish community in Cabramatta, left Australia. However, already on the day following his departure, a large group of his fellow countrymen assembled in the port of Melbourne to welcome new priests of the Society of Christ, Fr Józef A. Kolodziej and Fr Władysław Lisik.

Fr Władysław Lisik went to do pastoral work in Gippsland at the end of October 1962. He took up residence at the Australian presbytery in Morwell. Fr. Józef A. Kolodziej took up residence at the home for priests of the Society of Christ in Bankstown, and included Poles in Cabramatta and Fairfield in his pastoral work. A welcome for the new priest was organised at the White Eagle House on the 21st of October 1962.

Fr Franciszek Feruga arrived on the Australian continent during the last quarter of 1963. Fr Franciszek joined the Society of Christ in France and completed his theological studies in Rome, where he was ordained in 1959. Afterwards he did Polish pastoral work in West Germany.

The next priest of the Society of Christ arrived in Sydney on the 4th of March 1964. It was Fr Józef Furman, who took up pastoral duties in Bankstown and continued the work, which was begun by Fr E. Gagajek, who left Australia for Canada at the end of the month. Fr Edmund's countrymen in Bankstown described his activities in the Catholic Weekly as follows: *He was our father, friend and adviser in our daily troubles and life's vicissitudes. [...] He lived for the Polish community in Bankstown.*

The church fair in honour of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Marayong in 1964 included the news that a church will be built there, a monument to Poland's Millennium of Christianity and in gratitude to God and Our Lady, Queen of Poland. The church will also be a place where the picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa will remain after the peregrination around Australia. The year 1964 brought deep mourning to the whole Polish migrant community. Archbishop Józef Gawlina, the protector of Poles abroad nominated by Pope Pius XII, died on the 21st of September. By a decree issued on the 20th of October 1964, Pope Paul VI entrusted Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński with the care for Polish refugees, who, in turn nominated Prelate Władysław Rubin as his delegate. Later Prelate Rubin became a bishop, archbishop and cardinal.

The year 1965 was the time of peregrination of Our Lady around Australia, combined with retreats as well as intensive work around the construction of the church in Marayong. It was the year when a Corpus Christi procession took place in the grounds of the Children's Home in Marayong for the first time.

The Millennium Year 1966 was rich in spiritual experiences for the whole Polish community in Australia. On the 6th of March, after Holy Mass at the Saint Felix Church in Bankstown, the Polish community in Sydney organised a protest manifestation as an answer to the decision of the regime in Poland, which made it impossible for the Polish Primate and some of the bishops to take part in the Millennium of Polish Christianity celebrations in Rome. However a large group of Polish pilgrims from Australia travelled to Rome and to Poland for the celebrations. Not all persons wanting to go were given visas to the Polish Peoples Republic. The following Polish community priests were able to accompany the pilgrims to Poland: Fr M. Chrostowski OP, Fr Jozef A. Kolodziej, Fr J. Kuczmanski and Fr F. Wozniczak. On the 7th of May the pilgrims attended Holy Mass at St Stanislaus Church, celebrated by Bishop Rubin, who was assisted by Fr Jaroszka and Fr Kolodziej. In the afternoon they took part in an audience with the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI. On the same day the Poles in Sydney assembled in the cathedral, where Fr J. Gula celebrated Holy Mass and Fr A. Baranowski preached the sermon. The picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa was exhibited in the cathedral and this gave Cardinal N. Gilroy's words even more meaning.

On the 28th of August a crowd of six thousand Poles came together for the church fair and the Millennium celebrations in Marayong. During Holy Mass the sermon was delivered by another member of the Society of Christ, Fr Zbigniew Pajdak. Remembering the Millennium celebrations, one has to mention the exhibition at the Australian National University's Menzies Library, hosted by Dr J. Zubrzycki, who welcomed all newcomers. The delegation from Sydney included General Juliusz Kleeberg, Fathers Baranowski and Lisik and two Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth from Marayong. The consecration of the Church of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Marayong was the crowning achievement of the Millennium Year. The festivities took place on Tuesday the 27th of December and the consecration was performed by Cardinal N. Gilroy.

The year 1968 was a year full of events, of which the most important one was, without any doubt, the two-month long visit by Bishop Wladyslaw Rubin, delegate of the Primate of Poland for pastoral care of Polish migrants. It was also the year when Polish priests published the first issue of "Przegląd Katolicki" (Catholic Review). It appeared in the third quarter of the year and at that time was published as a quarterly. The editor's office was situated at the home of the priest of the Society of Christ in Bankstown, with the work being managed by Fr Zbigniew Pajdak. Chief Editor was Fr Kasjan Wolak, who was living in Brisbane. The paper was published under the auspices of Bishop Rubin and the first issue included information about the general synod of bishops in Rome, articles about the liturgical reform and a photographic report about Bishop W. Rubin's visit to Australia. Another new and important initiative for the whole Polish community during the third quarter of 1968 was the construction of the Old People's Home in Marayong. On the 10th of November 1968, during Independence Day celebrations, Fr K. Wolak led the ceremony of placing, in the altar of the chapel, an urn with earth from Katyn, the place of martyrdom of Polish officers killed by the Soviets.

On the 7th of February 1969 Fr Szczepan Wesoly was ordained as a bishop and became the new Delegate of the Primate of Poland for Poles Abroad. That same year, on the 17th of July,

the community of the Society of Christ in Australia welcomed new members in Australia. Three priests arrived on the ship "Galileo Galilei". They were Fr Mirosław Gebicki, Fr Marian Kolodziej and Fr Stanisław Lipski. Also in 1969, the Polish priest in the Newcastle-Maitland diocese moved into a house in the suburb of Mayfield, which had been purchased for him. This house continues to be the home for Polish priests to this day. The 30th of November 1969 was noted in the chronicles of the Society of Christ in Australia as being of particular importance. It was the day when Polish centres in Gippsland welcomed their new priest, Fr Marian Kolodziej. Their previous chaplain, Fr Józef Gula, had been transferred to pastoral duties among Poles in England. He was entrusted with the mission of organising a new province of the Society of Christ.

In 1970 Archbishop Władysław Rubin came to Australia on his second visit. On the 18th of January he blessed the commencement of work to build a new church for Poles in Essendon, Victoria. On the 15th of February the Poles in Bankstown welcomed their new priest, Fr S. Lipski, and on the same day Fr Janusz Andrzej Duczowski arrived in Sydney. It was in Cabramatta that he celebrated his first Holy Mass for Poles in Australia. Subsequently Fr Andrzej moved to Marayong, where he took up his permanent pastoral duties. 1970 was also the year when priests of the Society of Christ took up pastoral work among Poles in New Zealand. Fr Władysław Lisik was warmly welcomed in Wellington on the 14th of June. On the other hand, after the departure of Fr A. Stopa in 1969, Poles in Tasmania were left without a permanent priest. It was only after the arrival of Fr Franciszek Feruga on the 1st of April 1970 that the Polish community on that island was offered permanent pastoral care.

In 1971 Fr Józef A. Kolodziej was entrusted with the responsibilities of superior of the priests of the Society of Christ in Australia. His duties in Cabramatta-Fairfield were taken over by Fr Mirosław Gebicki.

The year 1972 began with preparations for a visit by Fr Wojciech Kania, the first General Superior who decided to visit his fellow priests in Australia. However, at the very beginning the joyously expected occasion was overshadowed by sorrow and grief. On the 9th of February 1972 Fr Marian Kolodziej died in a car accident. He had been on the way at night from Gippsland to Sydney to welcome the General Superior. The memorial services, led by the General Superior, were conducted in Morwell and in Sydney. On the 16th of February 1972 the body of Fr Marian Kolodziej was laid to rest at the Pine Grove Cemetery near Marayong.

During his visit Fr Wojciech Kania went to all pastoral centres of the Society of Christ and towards the end of March he introduced Fr Mirosław Gebicki to his pastoral duties in Canberra-Queanbeyan. On the 16th of August 1972 Fr Stanisław Marut arrived from Poland and just four days later he took up his duties in Cabramatta-Fairfield. The opening of the centre in East Roseville was a clear indication how the pastoral care by priests of the Society of Christ was developing. The first Holy Mass in Polish was celebrated on the 24th of December 1972 by Fr Józef A. Kolodziej.

The World Eucharistic Congress was held in Melbourne the following year. Among the participants was Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, who arrived in February from Poland. During his short stay he visited all Polish pastoral centres. He consecrated the church in Essendon and he ordained two Jesuits, Fr Wiesław Slowik and Fr Leonard Kiesch. During his travels he was accompanied by Bishop Szczepan Wesoly, the new protector of Poles Abroad. And he was the one who celebrated the Ash Wednesday liturgy in Marayong on the 7th of March and who

began the Lenten retreat for Poles at St Felix's Church in Bankstown. The 15th of March saw the arrival in Sydney of Fr Stefan Koczab from Poland. His arrival increased the number of priests of the Society of Christ in Australia to eleven. A short time later Fr Bernard Bednarz arrived in Sydney by ship. He was sent to his post in Newcastle.

In late June of 1973 the priests of the Society of Christ living in Bankstown moved from De Witt Street to a newly build home at 4 Little Road. On the 28th of November a new committee of the sub-province was elected and approved by the General Superior. Its members were Fr Zbigniew Pajdak as superior of the sub-province, Fr Miroslaw Gebicki as first counsellor and Fr Andrzej Duczkowski as second counsellor and economist. Late in 1973, after the death of Fr Kasjan Wolak OFM cap., the priests of the Society of Christ took over the pastoral care at the Bowen Hills parish in Brisbane. Fr Jozef A. Kolodziej was nominated as parish priest and Fr Bernard Bednarz became the curate.

The year 1974 was celebrated in Australia as the silver jubilee of post-war Polish migrants to this country. The Vice-General of the Society of Christ, Fr Edward Szymanek from Poland, was invited to take part in the celebrations. In mid-1974 the priests of the Society of Christ welcomed two new arrivals, Fr Kazimierz Bojda and Fr Stanislaw Wrona. Fr Kazimierz took up his duties at the Cabramatta-Fairfield centre and Fr Stanislaw, together with Fr M. Gebicki, started the mission of the Society of Christ in South Australia, where they had been invited by Bishop J.W. Gleeson. With the help of Bishop Gleeson, a house was bought at 1 Gawler Street in Woodville West on the 2nd of January 1975. It was also in January that the General Superior, Fr Wojciech Kania, came to Australia on his second visit. After the departure for Poland of Fr L. Jaroszka, who had been working among Poles in Geelong, Victoria, Archbishop Little asked the Society of Christ to take up permanent pastoral work in that city. The post was taken over by Fr Ignacy Smaga on Sunday the 25th of May. In June Fr Wlodzimierz Michalski, the priest from Ashfield, died in Poland and the priests of the Society of Christ took over the pastoral care of the local Poles.

In June 1976 Prelate Witold Dzieciol, who had been the Rector of the Polish Catholic Mission for many years, died during a visit to Poland. His duties were taken over by Fr Zbigniew Pajdak. Also in 1976 Bishop Szczepan Wesoly came to visit Polish pastoral centres. The last function of his visit was the consecration of the grounds for a Polish Senior's Home next to the church in Marayong.

The first camp for Polish youth, mainly altar boys, opened in "Bielany" on the 15th of January 1977. The leader of the summer initiative was Fr Z. Pajdak, who was assisted by Fr K. Bojda, Fr S. Koczab, Fr Ignacy Smaga, Fr T. Winnicki and Fr S. Wrona. It was also worth entering in the chronicles of the Polish community in Australia that on the first Sunday in May, during the celebrations of the Feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa, Queen of Poland, the foundation stone was laid in the wall of the Polish Senior's Home.

The following year, 1978, was an important one in the history of the Society of Christ in the Antipodes. A new monastic province of the Society of Christ in Australia and New Zealand was founded on the 1st of January by a decision of the General Superior and dedicated to the Holy Family. Henceforth the history of the province began to develop in a more organised manner. New priests were arriving from Poland, thus increasing the strength of the community and new pastoral posts were created. On the 24th of February Archbishop J.W. Gleeson gave his permission for the Society of Christ to use the Church of the Resurrection in Unley (Adelaide) for the benefit of the Polish community. The next General Superior of the

Society of Christ, Dr Czeslaw Kaminski, arrived in mid-year for a visit. However, the most important event in 1978 occurred on the 16th of October, when for the first time in the history of the Church a Pole became the Successor of St Peter and head of the universal Church. The election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, who took the name of John Paul II, gave the Polish clergy abroad a new impulse, new strength and new motivation. Thanks to this event Poles were able to rediscover themselves and this provided a new impetus to pastoral activities. The 27 years of Polish religious life in Australia, which followed this event, were supported by strong foundations, the Rock of St Peter, to a much stronger degree than before.

The Poles and their clergy in Australia have always reacted very strongly to everything that was going on in their old country. The birth of “Solidarity” and subsequently the declaration of martial law in Poland resulted in a new wave of Polish migrants. Refugees from Poland began to arrive in Australia. They were young people, who were looking for a place where they and their families could live in safety and security. New places of worship had to be created, where the newcomers could congregate in prayer. One of them was the pastoral centre in Coogee, which was opened on the 12th of May 1980. Fr Stanislaw Rakiej became its first priest. To cover the new pastoral needs, more priests were sent to the Antipodes by the congregation’s supervisors. On the other hand, Fr J.A. Kolodziej and J. Westfal left Australia to work among the Polish migrant community in the Republic of South Africa. They were replaced in Australia by Fr Maksymilian Szura, Fr Tomasz Zaremba, Fr Jozef Migacz, Fr Krzysztof Chwalek, Fr Mieczyslaw Kolodziej, Fr Tadeusz Przybylak and Fr Bogdan Wilkaniec. A generational change was also occurring, now that the Society of Christ had been working in Australia for almost a quarter of a century. The nomination of Fr Stanislaw Wrona as the new provincial head by the General Superior in 1983 was a clear indication of that change. Fr Wrona took over also as the rector of the Polish Catholic Mission in Australia and New Zealand. Also in 1983 Fr Maksymilian Szura took over as editor of the “Przegląd Katolicki” (Catholic Review) – the monthly published by the province.

In the nineteen eighties the Province of the Holy Family included three countries: Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of South Africa. In 1984 the personnel of the province increased by the arrival of Fr Antoni Szewczyk and Fr Wojciech Swiatkowski. There was plenty of work for them, because the eighth decade of the last century was a period when a great number of new migrants from Poland arrived in Australia. It was the time when many children’s choirs were formed, new Polish Saturday schools were opened, the scouts and girl guides and folkloric groups gained new members ... but also senior’s clubs, which included the generation of the first immigrants. New ideas resulted in the promotion of Polish religious culture, such as annual concerts of Christmas carols. The priests of the Society of Christ were to be found in all these events. The most important spiritual experience during those years was, without a doubt, the meeting with Pope John Paul II in Melbourne. During his first papal pilgrimage to Australia the Holy Father included the meeting with his countrymen in his itinerary. It was set for the 28th of November 1986 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Almost 60 thousand people took part in the event, which was an overwhelming majority of Australians of Polish origin. Two years later the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Jozef Glemp, arrived for a historic visit to the Polish community. He visited all Polish pastoral centres, accompanied by Archbishop Szczepan Wesoly and Bishop Jerzy Dabrowski.

The month of June 1989 brought great political and social changes to Poland. It was the beginning of the road to freedom. From that moment on the Polish migrant community, not only in Australia, but all over the world, was able to rejoice in the rebirth of freedom in their old country, was able to “move closer” to Poland and was at last able to sing “And bless our

free country, o Lord". The arrival of the new Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Sydney, and later visits by members and senators of the Polish parliament, were a sign that the times had changed. The year 1990 saw the commencement of the apostolate in Australia of the Missionary Sisters of Christ the Lord. New priests of the Society of Christ from Poland continued to increase the strength of the province. A sign of the province's development was, without a doubt, the consecration and opening of the Central Home of Polish Clergy in Canberra on the 16th of October 1993. It also became the Provincial Home. More than a thousand countrymen from all over Australia took part in the festivity. Since then the Home is the place of meetings and of annual retreats for the priests as well as of many visits by fellow countrymen visiting the capital of Australia or travelling in this vast country.

In January 1994 the position of Provincial was entrusted to Fr Stanislaw Lipski, who was in South Africa at that time. Fr Jerzy Prucnal was sent from Australia to take his place there. The obligation to organise the third chapter in the 20th year of the province's existence was placed upon the shoulders of Fr Lipski. It debated under his chairmanship in Canberra from the 4th until the 8th of May. Fr Michal Kaminski represented the General Superior.

Towards the end of the nineties (in 1998) the Society of Christ bought a two-hectare property in Keysborough, Victoria. The place was discovered by Fr Maksymilian Szura. The plot of land included a spacious house and a tin shed. It was a convenient locality for the construction of a church. The priests of the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Fr M. Szura and Fr Tomasz Nowak, moved into the purchased home.

Early in the Jubilee Year 2000 Archbishop Szczepan Wesoly, as the spiritual protector of Polish migrants, sent a pastoral letter to his flock. He reminded people that faith was a gift and the time of the Great Jubilee was to be a time to revive one's faith. In Sydney the Polish church in Marayong was honoured by the privilege of a Jubilee Fair and was thus visited by Poles more often. The Great Jubilee Year carried with it new pastoral responsibilities. The priests of the Society of Christ included them in their work under the leadership of a new provincial, Fr Tadeusz Przybylak, who is now already in his second term serving the priests of the congregation and his countrymen in Australia and New Zealand.

The year 2000 was for Sydney also the year of the 27th Olympic Games. The Polish priests took a very active part in the welcoming of visitors from Poland. The first years of the new century brought also new things in the life of the Province of the Holy Family. On the 29th of April 2003 a new home for the priests in Sydney was consecrated in the suburb of Miller near Liverpool. The consecration festivities were presided over by the Vice-General of the Society of Christ, Fr Zbigniew Rakiej. That same year, on the 20th of May 2003, Fr Andrzej Kolaczowski was ordained in Poznan. He was the first priest of the Society of Christ from Australia. After many months of waiting, the Planning Office of the City of Dandenong, Victoria, decided in favour of an application by the Church Committee and the Society of Christ to build a Church of Divine Mercy in Keysborough. The consecration of the ground took place on the 23rd of November and was presided over by Bishop Christopher Prowse. The approval of a new Directorship of the Province by the general committee of the Society was an important moment in the monastic life of the priests of the Society of Christ in Australia and New Zealand. It occurred on the 28th of November 2003.

The following year, after the death of Fr Zenon Grodz SVD and upon a request by the bishop of Wollongong, the priests of the Society of Christ began new pastoral duties in the Macarthur region. From the 13th of February 2005 onwards the school chapel of the Marist Brothers in

Campbelltown served as a place of worship and the first priest there was Fr Antoni Dudek. Now Polish countrymen come together at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Minto.

In the evening of the 2nd of April 2005 the whole Church was filled with mourning. The Polish Pope John Paul II died on the eve of the Feast of Divine Mercy after a long illness and terrible suffering. Wherever possible, Poles gathered, together with their priests, to pray for their Great Countryman, who departed for His Father's Home after almost 27 years of service as the successor of St Peter. Millions of pilgrims assembled at the Vatican for the funeral of John Paul II. Cardinal J. Ratzinger became the successor of the deceased pope, taking the name of Benedict XVI.

The construction of the Church of Divine Mercy in Keysborough was a great challenge for the whole province. The Provincial, Fr Tadeusz Przybylak, and Fr Kazimierz Bojda, the local priest, put their hearts into the realisation of this work. The beautiful church was consecrated by His Eminence Archbishop Denis Hart on the 22nd of April 2006, the eve of the Feast of Divine Mercy. The importance of this event can be seen in the presence of Bishop Ryszard Karpinski, the Delegate of the Polish Episcopate for pastoral work abroad, and Fr Tadeusz Winnicki, the General Superior of the Society of Christ. By a decision of Archbishop D. Hart the new Polish church in Keysborough became the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy for the Melbourne Diocese.

The World Youth Days in Sydney had been announced by Pope John Paul II for July 2008. The whole year preceding this important event was filled with preparations by Polish young people and other countrymen to meet Pope Benedict XVI and the pilgrims from all over the world. The Provincial, Fr Tadeusz Przybylak, took upon himself the whole burden of the complicated organisational matters. The priests in their centres got together the young people and with the help of devoted countrymen prepared accommodation for the pilgrims from Poland. The joy of meeting young people from Poland and from abroad, strengthened by a strong faith, was tremendous. The new General Superior of the Society of Christ, Fr Tomasz Sielicki, came also to this exceptional get together and he used the occasion to visit the province and pastoral centres, meeting his countrymen in Australia and New Zealand.

Now is the time to give jubilee thanks for 50 years of missionary activity on the oldest continent, but the last one drawn on the world's map. As a monastic community we want to thank the Lord for the gift of our vocation and for showing us the place in which to serve in His Church. We are grateful to our countrymen for joining us in our missionary activity and for all the help in its expansion. *Te Deum laudamus ... We praise you, o Lord!*

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At present the province of the Holy Family consists of thirty priests, of whom three are doing temporary work on the British Isles. During those 50 years 12 priests have been transferred to work in other provinces of the Society.

Eight priests chose to work as diocesan clergy. Four priests left the priesthood. Four priests were taken by the Lord: Fr Edmund Gagajek, Fr Marian Kolodziej, Fr Stanislaw Marut and Fr Jan Westfal.