



Father Jan Sajewicz, OMI

(1910 – 1994)

Born on 14 April 1910 in Wojnówka, Polesie, and died on 30 August 1994 in Edmonton, Alberta. He completed a one-year novitiate (1931-1932) in Markowice, Pomerania, and received training in the Seminary in Krobia and Obra (voivodeship/province Poznan). Fr. Sajewicz was ordained on 27 June 1937 and, a year later, immigrated to Canada.

He served the pastoral ministry for the following parishes: St. Stanislaus Kostka in Toronto, Ontario; Holy Ghost Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba; St. Hyacinth Church in Ottawa (ON); St. Stanislaus Kostka 's and St. Casimir's parishes in Toronto; other parishes in Edmonton (AB); Saskatoon (SK); East Selkirk (MB), and at the St. Benedictine's Monastery in Middlechurch,(MB).

The WWII (Africa)

During the years 1943 - 1948, Fr. Sajewicz was working as a chaplain for the Polish Air Forces in Kenya. He served the pastoral ministry in camps for the Polish refugees who fled Russia. According to his memoirs:

There were about twenty refugee camps for twenty thousand Poles. The camps were funded by the Polish Government in Exile's Social Assistance. Each camp had a British commander and reporting to him a Polish supervisor with several staff members. There were teams of teachers, an operational manager, a convenience store, a butcher, and so on. There was also the pastoral ministry (Sajewicz, 1986)

The pastoral ministry was facing many challenges caused by the uncertain future and the peculiarities of life in extreme climate. Most of the population consisted of women and children who fled the hardships they experienced in the Soviet Russia, and were haunted by still vivid recollections of starvation and ill-treatment. Nevertheless, thanks to the collective efforts of the volunteers and priests, life in the camp was now getting organized with the secure and predictable structures of school programs, scout groups for children, various activities for adults, and regular religious practices. A social fund was created from the contributions of all working individuals donating thirteen percent of their wages to assist those women and children who had no other support.

In Ifunda camp in Tanzania, Fr. Sajewicz participated in building a church for the community. As he describes:

We used African grass to cover the roof and bricks for the floor. Inside the building, there were small folding chairs. All the celebrations, both national and religious, took place in this church. On the cemetery gage, we wrote: „In memory of those who will not return to their homeland (Sajewicz, 1986).

Canada

Fr. Sajewicz returned to Canada in 1948. At first, he worked in Toronto, and later, in Winnipeg where he published *Gazeta Polska*. In the later years, he was also the editor of magazine *Niepokalana* issued in France.

In 1951, he settled in Ottawa, ON. Among those who had already arrived there during the post-war years were the Polish-Arm-Forces-in-the-West veterans and their families, the concentration-camps survivors, and refugees. They all shared a desire to participate in the masses conducted in Polish in a Polish church. Fr. Sajewicz, with his energy, perseverance and dedication, was determined to meet these needs. Therefore, in January 1952, he set up a Church Committee and, with the help of some parishioners, created a fund for building a church. He made a list of addresses that the parishioners could use for canvassing donations for this cause. To set an example, Fr. Sajewicz decreased the amount of his own daily food allowance from six to four dollars.

On 28 January 1957, a groundbreaking plaque was built-in for the construction of the St. Hyacinth's church that was designed by architect Roman Stankiewicz. In July 1957, the main building and the adjacent facilities were completed. The first Mass at St. Hyacinth's Church was celebrated on 4 August 1957. This beautiful and welcoming church has become an important religious and cultural center for the Ottawa's Polish community.

By building this second church, after the one that he created in Africa during the war, Fr. Sajewicz gave a true meaning to the maxim *Non omnis moriar* (*Not all of me will die*); not only did he offer his missionary services to the countless number of faithful parishioners but also made his mark in the form of these two holy places of worship.

In 1958, Fr. Sajewicz left Ottawa for Toronto, where for the next seven years he worked for the St. Stanislaus Kostka and the St. Cazimir's parishes. After that he lived in Edmonton, Saskatoon and Winnipeg, respectively.

As he recalls in his memoirs:

During the Polish Millennium jubilee celebrations, I was touring across Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and some parts of Ontario with the holy procession carrying the image of Our Lady that we used to call Visitation. To me it was the most enjoyable way of ministering in Canada. People were arriving from distant places, some were bringing the sick.

Displaying the icon of Our Lady in several churches was the opportunity for me to offer a series of lectures that would familiarize the audiences with the history of Poland, as well as with the stories about the Black Madonna of Czestochowa (*Matka Boska Częstochowska*). After that, I went to France to work as the editor of a monthly Polish Catholic magazine. Two years later, I returned to Edmonton, and then to Saskatoon where I had a car accident. Finally, I settled at the Benedictine nuns in Winnipeg. For the past thirteen years, I have been the chaplain for the Polish Combatants' Association in Canada. (Sajewicz, 1986).

"I took part in a great competition, I completed the race, and I guarded the faith." (2 TM 4)

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