



History of St. Stanislaus Kostka's Catholic Church, Bowlus, MN.

Diamond Jubilee of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, Bowlus, MN
1909-1984. CAP at Orchard Lake.

The parish of St. Stanislaus Kostka, Bowlus, Minnesota, is located in Two Rivers Township in the south central part of Morrison County. The citizens of Bowlus incorporated into a village in 1908, just two years prior to the founding of St. Stanislaus Kostka's Parish. The growth and development of the village has been intimately associated with the history of the parish.

The early history of the Bowlus community is rather sketchy, especially before it became an incorporated village. It is not known just who were the first settlers in the area, but the first Polish settlers were John and Simon Schwientek, who arrived about 1868. Thereafter, there was a continual influx of Polish people from the East and from Poland itself. Many of these settlers had left their mother country because of the harsh policies of the German Chancellor Bismarck, who through his enforcement of the Kulturkampf, was openly anti-Catholic and anti-Pole. In 1879 the Martin Czech family emigrated from Poland. They secured homestead rights over 160 acres of heavily-timbered land which was later to develop into the community of Bowlus.

In 1881 the township of Two Rivers was founded. It received its name from the two streams flowing through the area emptying into the Mississippi River, which serves as the eastern boundary of Two Rivers Township. This area soon flourished with farms and small enterprises. Among the early settlers were the families of Sam Schwientek, Joseph Bursey, Anthony Yorek, Albert Kleszcz, John Weber, Henry Armstrong, John Sevens, John Seigel, Alex and Thomas Opatz, as well as the Rudolph, Prokott, and Pussy families. The sons and daughters of these families often recall the long Sunday morning hikes or drives to either North Prairie, about four miles southwest of Bowlus, or to Swan River (Ledoux—now Sobieski), about eight miles to the northwest, where they were able to attend Holy Mass. The parish at North Prairie, which Pr. Xavier Pierz, the famous missionary priest of the Minnesota Territory visited in 1867, continued to provide for the spiritual needs of the majority of these first settlers until a parish church at Bowlus could be constructed.

In 1907 the officers of the Minneapolis and Sault Ste. Marie Railroad (Soo Line) announced the plans for the building of a railroad connecting Brooten and Duluth which would pass through Two Rivers. That same year the Soo Line Railroad purchased a number of acres from Martin Czech, and on July 7, 1907, Bowlus was platted and established as a village. At that time the population of the community numbered about 160. Albert A. Barton was elected to the office of village president, while Henry Armstrong, Louis Chirhart, and Joseph Phol were the first trustees. Other village officials include Joseph Swalinkovich, Fred Cairnes, Martin Larson, and Vincent Schwientek.

Since most of the residents of the fast-growing village were Catholics, it soon became apparent that a Catholic Church was needed in the area if the spiritual needs of the citizens were to be properly cared for. The movement to organize the new parish culminated in a meeting of the Catholic citizens held on May 20, 1909. Here it was, decided that the building of a church was to begin as soon as possible. To finance this undertaking, the building committee decided that pledges of \$125.00 would be solicited from the families wishing to join the new parish. This committee then petitioned the Soo Line Railroad, which owned much of the property in the village, to sell or donate a tract of land on which to build the church. The railroad officials replied by generously donating nearly a full block of land just west of the business area of the village. On July 20, 1909, the contract for the construction of the church with a seating capacity of about 400 was let to Joseph Marsolek of St. Cloud for the sum of \$12,475.00.

Many of the older citizens of Bowlus have vivid memories of the building of the parish church. The parishioners, of course, contributed a great share of the labor involved. A full basement was dug with horses and scrapers, and local farmers supplied the stones which serve as the foundation of the church. The red brick for the superstructure was shipped via the Northern Pacific Railroad to Royalton and then hauled by horse and wagon to Bowlus. The stained-glass windows of the church were purchased from Forman, Foyd, and Company of Minneapolis at the total cost of \$590.00.

While the building of the church rapidly progressed, the work of organizing the parish itself continued under the leadership of the late Rev. Joseph C. Janski, who was at that time the administrator of the Holy Cross parish at North Prairie, as well as the secretary of Bishop James Trobec, D.D. The first parish trustees were John Smieja, who held the office of secretary, and John Filip, who acted as treasurer. The work on the church apparently continued throughout the winter without much difficulty and was ready for the dedication in the spring of 1910. On May 8 of 1910, the Most Rev. James Trobec, D.D., Bishop of St. Cloud, dedicated the new church under the patronage of St. Stanislaus Kostka, the 18-year-old Polish Jesuit novice who died in 1568. Father August Plachta from Royalton celebrated the first Mass in the newly-built church. At this time there were nearly 80 families belonging to the new parish.

Bishop Trobec was not able to supply St. Stanislaus with its own resident pastor immediately, and so Father Joseph C. Janski continued to administer the Bowlus parish from his residence at North Prairie.

In October of 1910 the newly-ordained Father Vincent J. Wotzka was appointed as the first resident pastor of St. Stanislaus Kostka's parish. Since a parish rectory was not yet built, Father Wotzka rented a house about two blocks from the church, which then served as the pastor's temporary residence. Father Wotzka was pastor of the Bowlus parish for only ten months, during which he officiated at the first burial and the first marriage of the parish. The deceased was also the first parishioner to be interred in the parish cemetery southwest of the village. (Albert Kleszcz)

From August to November of 1911 the Rev. Jonn Kromolicki held the office of pastor. After Father Kromolicki's short tenure of office, Bishop Trobec petitioned Abbot Peter Engel, OSB, Abbot of St. John's Abbey at Collegeville, to send a priest who could care for the Bowlus parish. Abbot Peter presented the Rev. Peter Wollnick, OSB, who served as administrator of the parish until 1914; In 1913 the building of the two-story, red-brick rectory was begun just east of the church. The parishioners themselves, however, contributed much of the labor and some of the materials. One year after the

parish house had been built, the zealous members of the parish were happy to say that their parish was nearly free of debt. This parish house still serves as the pastor's residence.

In 1914 the first administrator of the Bowlus parish, Father Joseph C. Janski, returned—this time as the pastor. Father Janski remained as the spiritual leader of the parish until 1916, when the Rev. Theodore Rekosiak was appointed pastor. Father Rekosiak served the parish until October, 1917. At that time the Rev. Francis M. Bialka was appointed administrator of the parish. He served in this capacity until June of 1918. Father Bialka was then appointed to administer St. John Cantius' parish in St. Cloud. He was succeeded by Father Joseph C. Janski, who was returning to Bowlus for the third time, this time to remain until 1930. Bishop Joseph F. Busch then appointed the newly-ordained Father Aloysius B. Kroll to administer the affairs of the Bowlus parish until Father Francis M. Bialka was appointed in October of 1930 to again assume the office of pastor. Father Bialka served the Bowlus parish until retiring in June of 1969. At that time Father S. A. Fadrowski was appointed pastor of St. Stanislaus until 1977. He was succeeded by Father J. Alfred Kroll, who served the parish for six years until 1983 when Father Leroy A. Maus was appointed as pastor. Father Maus is now the present pastor serving the parish.

During the 75 years of its existence, St. Stanislaus' parish has been blessed with several vocations to the religious life. In 1939 Rev. Lawrence Zok, OSC, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Zok, was ordained a priest for the Crosier Monastery at Onamia, Minnesota. Rev. Ignatius Lempart, USC, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Anton Lempart, was ordained in 1943, also as a Crosier Father. He is now a chaplain at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Lincoln, Nebraska. Rev. David Maciej, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Maciej, was ordained a priest in 1980 and is now associate pastor of Holy Spirit parish in St. Cloud. Brother Gabriel (Raymond) Bieniek, OSB, now at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, is the only religious brother from the parish. Jerome Roth was ordained as a diaconate in 1982 and his deacon assignment is now to assist at St. Hedwig's and St. Mary's parishes in Holdingford, Minnesota. Eleven daughters of the parish have entered the religious life; they include Sr. M. Valeska (Victoria) Wochnick, OSB, now deceased, Sr. M. Bennet (Johanna) Bursey, OSB, Sr. M. Method (Mae J Phillip, OSB, Sr. Gemma (Agnes) Gallus, OSF, Sr. Anella (Clara) Bieniek, OSF, Sr. Charlene (Theresa) Lempart, OSF, Sr. Goretti (Stella) Lempart, OSF, Sr. Clement (Sylvia) Opatz, OSF, Sr. Jeannine (Jeanette) Prokott, OSF, Sr. Juniper (Rosean) Trettel, OSF, and Sr. Mary (Reneej Klisch, OSF.

St. Stanislaus Kostka parish has been the focal point of the majority of the 125 families, now numbering about 500 souls, who gather together for worship. It is in this church that the majority have been brought into the Mystical Body of Christ through the waters of baptism, and it is in this church where their Christian lives are formed and become strong. Surely the words of the late Holy Father, John XXIII, may fittingly describe this community of worshippers, in so far as, "...it is in the parish that... the faithful become like a true family, gathered around the altar and intent on spreading the truth and warmth of the Gospel in every walk of society by the selfless practice of charity, of good example, and of harmonious cooperation by all its members." (Letter of Cardinal Dalla Costa, 31 August 1960).