



Celebration of a Wonderful Friend

By: Aloys Notzon, PHC Chairman and President

This month, the Polish Heritage Center celebrates the lives of Bishop John W. Yanta on the second anniversary of his death, and also of Betty Kowalik, our Board Treasurer, who died on June 30, 2024. It is my pleasure to link these two influential people by their friendship and their connection to the Center.

Betty and her husband George, longtime friends of Bishop Yanta, were among the first people he contacted about the possibility of a Center. I first got to know Betty when she, George, and Sam and Susie Kotara attended a goal setting session that Bishop Yanta recruited me to facilitate in Panna Maria at the old Snoga store in 2010. This session would later lead to the forming of the Board, acquiring the land, and hiring the designer, architect and engineer. George and Betty were early members of the Heritage Circle, whose foundational donations were key to the eventual success of the PHC.

Because of Betty's financial skills and experience, Bishop recruited her to be the Treasurer of the Board, and she spent countless hours dealing with the CPA, the accounting firm, the banks and donors. She also prepared all of our financial statements until we had staff expertise. The Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria was so blessed to have Betty Kowalik's active participation in Bishop Yanta's efforts.

She fully supported his vision of quality, not only for the Center, but also in our finances and our operations. Her work ethic, her attention to detail and her demand for accuracy were essential in the successful opening and operations of the PHC. As Treasurer, Betty acted as the liaison between the finance people and Bishop Yanta. She insisted on a system that portrayed exactly the financial condition of the Center. She was also the leader of the effort to develop and adopt the Center's policy handbook.

Betty had so many admirable personal qualities: intelligence, joyfulness, kindness and integrity. God was her first priority, then home and family, and then her friends and volunteer activities. She set a wonderful example, giving her time, talent and treasure to making the Polish Heritage Center a success, even though she herself wasn't Polish. Betty and George were not only

Heritage Circle members, but also founding sponsors of the Lobby Mural, and they funded the PHC's portrait of Bishop Yanta. Betty was also instrumental in the development of the Sustaining Membership and Bishop Yanta recognitions in the Our Lady of Czestochowa gallery.

Betty was a devoted wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother and friend. She brought that same intensity to her role as Treasurer and Board member of the PHC. She spent innumerable hours on the development and review, not only of the financials, but also of the audios, videos and texts of the PHC's exhibits and movies as a member of the Writing Committee.

Her strength was rooted in her faith and it is appropriate that her obituary ended with: "Betty was a devout follower of Jesus Christ, and her faith never wavered throughout her 13 year battle with cancer. It's to Him she would give all the glory for the blessings in her life."

We are so blessed and grateful for Betty's life and her inspirational efforts and support.



Deepen Your Family Connections at the PHC

By: Alice Poore, PHC Executive Director

Family reunions are all about coming together to share old memories, spending the day creating new ones, and learning about your family heritage. It is a time to both reconnect with family you know while meeting new extended members. The younger family members learn from their elders, and the older members learn by hearing the stories of the young.

What better way to commemorate this special time than with a visit to the Polish Heritage Center. June proved to be a perfect month for just these kinds of get-togethers. Sue Carter started off the month with a reunion of 10 family members. The next day, the PHC hosted the Kyle Crews family with 31 attending, and the Jonietz family with over 65 members who enjoyed a delicious catered meal along with homemade desserts.

The following weekend we hosted Lisa Henicke's family reunion with 28 members traveling to the Center. We then hosted the Anne Creighton Crews family whose members traveled from Missouri, Colorado, Washington State and from various cities in Texas to enjoy a day at the PHC. These families all spent several hours with us - enjoying the documentary, visiting the Cestohowa exhibit, and listening with their audio wands to the stories of the

early immigrants in the Gallery. They walked over to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church to see firsthand the beautiful painted ceiling, stunning stained-glass windows and the mosaic picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa given to the people of Panna Maria by President Lyndon Baines Johnson. Next, our visitors walked to St Joseph's school, the oldest Polish Catholic school in the United States, now a museum.

It was a joy to watch each of these families share hugs and well wishes as these reunions came to an end and to listen to the plans for a reunion at the same time, same place, next year. Reunions are a great way to strengthen the future of a family! If you are interested in planning a reunion for your family, contact Alice Poore at 830-310-8612.



PHC Summer Spruce-up

By: Alice Poore, PHC Executive Director

With the student tours ending in June, it seemed the perfect time to schedule some major attention to the Center. After the removal of the beautiful Cestohowa exhibit, it was obvious that the walls in that wing needed repair and painting. PHC was closed for two days while a very efficient team from Hinojosa Painting came in, repaired areas with normal wear and tear damage, and then painted the entire wing. We are very pleased with the finished product. They achieved the exact level of quality we expect at the PHC.

As we all know, once you begin any kind of project and that endeavor is completed, your focus is drawn to other areas that need attention. No surprise that with all the visitors we have had in the past year, the terrazzo and tile floors needed some heavy maintenance. A team of technicians from Champion Diversified Services, who are experts in caring for terrazzo floors, determined it was time for light stripping, repolishing, and resealing of our floors. The floors are beautiful again! Without the efforts of my amazing team at the Center, this undertaking would have been a struggle. The entire lobby area, gift shop items and furniture had to be taken down and removed to other areas of the Center. Board Vice President Randy Pawelek and Vince Sala stepped in to move the heaviest pieces and I can't thank them enough.

Once again, the PHC was closed for two days while this process was carried out. Our team then tackled the task of moving the furniture back into place and setting up all the items in the lobby and gift shop. All this extra work has definitely made a statement.

The Polish Heritage Center is again looking as beautiful as the first day visitors were welcomed and just in time for Bishop Yanta's Celebration of Life, scheduled for August 3.

Unsung Heroes from an Undersung Country (Part Two)

By: Joseph Pearce

Another hero who will not be known to most people outside of the Polish-speaking world is the Jesuit Fr. Piotr Skarga. A leading figure of the Counter-Reformation in the late sixteenth century, during the time of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Fr. Skarga's eloquence was lauded in Poland. He was known as the Polish Bossuet, a reference to the renowned French bishop and theologian Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, who is considered one of the greatest orators and literary stylists of the French language.

The fact that Fr. Skarga is considered comparable to Bossuet speaks for itself. He is best known for two books. His Lives of the Saints has remained perennially popular, whereas his political treatise, the Sejm Sermons, has earned him the title as the "patriotic seer" who, as a prophet of Poland's doom, foresaw the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth and the consequent ending, for over a century, of Polish national sovereignty.

Yet another unsung hero of this undersung country is St. Andrew Bobola, a martyr who is almost unknown outside of Poland. This Jesuit priest, known as the "hunter of souls" for his missionary zeal, was tortured by Cossacks in 1657 for refusing to renounce his Catholic faith and was subsequently killed. Pope Pius XI canonized St. Andrew Bobola in 1938; his successor, Pius XII, issued an encyclical in 1957, on the 300th anniversary of the saint's martyrdom, in which the pope called St. Andrew Bobola "Christ's unconquered athlete," calling upon Catholics to imitate his faith and fortitude:

Let everyone, then, contemplate the strength of soul of St. Andrew Bobola, Martyr. Let them learn from his example, preserve intact his unconquered faith, and defend it by every means. Let them so imitate his apostolic zeal that they too will try, in every way they can, to strengthen the Kingdom of Christ on earth, and, so far as their state of life permits, to spread that Kingdom everywhere.

The pope then addressed the people of Poland directly, mindful that the Polish people were laboring under the tyranny of communism:

We direct Our words in a special way to those dwelling in Poland. For Andrew Bobola is their great glory, since he was born of that nation, and honored it not only by the splendor of so many virtues, but with the crimson of his martyrdom. Following his example, then, may they continue to hold fast to their ancestral faith in the face of all attacks. May they strive earnestly to live up to the Christian moral code. They should attentively consider this the greatest glory of their country: to imitate the unbreakable constancy of their ancestors and make Poland ever faithful, the outer bastion of Christianity.

Joseph Pearce is Visiting Professor of Literature at Ave Maria University and a Visiting Fellow of Thomas More College of Liberal Arts. This article first appeared in Crisis Magazine (crisismagazine.com) and is published here with the author's permission.





**THE
POLISH HERITAGE CENTER
AT PANNA MARIA**

13909 N FM 81
PO Box 25
Panna Maria, Texas 78144



PHC Hours: Wed. – Sat. 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
www.polishheritagecentertx.org
(830) 310-8612

The Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax deductible organization.

TAX ID: #46-0561240

News from the Heritage Communities

Father Bill Zadora retired this summer, shortly after celebrating the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood in late May. He served 37 of those years at Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church in St. Hedwig. Boleslaw Zadora was born in Tokarivia, Poland in 1949 and was ordained a Salvatorian priest in 1974. He served in Poland and Africa before coming to the U.S. in 1981.

He was assigned to the Archdiocese of San Antonio in 1983 to help the Salvatorian community take care of Polish immigrants in San Antonio, Austin, Fort Worth and Amarillo who came to Texas after Solidarity was banned by the Communist government in Poland.

Father Bill also served in Kenedy and Kosciusko. He served in St. Hedwig from 1987 – 2000 and from 2003 – 2024. During his long tenure at Annunciation parish, Father Bill oversaw the complete renovation of the church, buildings, cemetery, rectory and grounds. The wonderful parish center dedicated to John Paul II was also built.



In Father Bill's words:

"I thank God for the wonderful opportunity to walk with you in faith and grow in love of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary to whom our church is dedicated."

Information for this story comes courtesy of Deacon Rick Coronado, Today's Catholic and the Wilson County News.