

raising money to build the Polish Church. Construction and services began in 1913. In 1918, the Parish Church of the Nativity of St. Mary was completed.

The Official Seal of St. Mary's Church in Latin reads: R.C. PAROCHIA POLONICA ST. MARIAE NATIVITATIS, Sydney N.S. 1913 A.D. The English translation is Roman Catholic Polish Parish of St. Mary's Nativity or the Nativity of St. Mary. However, the appellation used is "St. Mary's Polish Church."

## Architecture and Art

The modified Gothic design of the exterior of St. Mary's Church is modelled on the style of a Polish Church in Quebec. The overall size is 66 ft. long and 44 ft. wide, with a spire 65 ft. high.

The interior of St. Mary's Polish Church repeats the Gothic influence of the outside. This influence is present in the high Altar, Pulpit, Baptismal Font and Communion Rail, all in white pillars with simulated marble. The same theme is continued in the arched ceiling and Stations of the Cross, which represents the means of Salvation for all peoples.

The original wooden building included two belfries. The one in the high spire above the main door held a large bell with a loud, deep chime. It was rung from the choir before principal church services. The bell in the shorter belfry at the rear of the church was rung from the vestry and was heard before evening services. Both bells are now in the main belfry but not used as they formerly were.

The main spire was struck and split by lightning in the summer of 1928. It was repaired and mounted with a wooden cross. This was destroyed by a storm in the early 1960s. In 1981, the large copper cross now present was erected.

Several noticeable changes have been made in the original structure of the church. The main spire was closed in because the louvered sides had been open to the weather. The rear belfry was taken down, and the four high spires that marked the corner of the roof have been almost leveled. Two narrow windows in the back wall, one on each side of the altar, have been removed. The traditional Rose Windows, of which there are two, were covered on the outside when the current siding was applied.

In addition to the light beige siding, various renovations have been made to the church. The basement was renovated into a meeting hall with a well equipped kitchen and washrooms; many parish functions now take place there. The church received a new roof, and oil fired heating systems were installed. New wiring and light fixtures were also added, but the central chandelier in the church was strengthened and left in.

The church floor was covered, and insulation and panelling took the place of wainscoting. Ceiling fans and moveable kneelers were installed. One set of stairs to the choir was removed, and the centre aisle was widened in the front. New doors were installed and concrete steps with railings were put up.

The tall translucent glass windows have since been replaced with windows of stained glass, each depicting a scene with the presence of St. Mary. Two of the original translucent glass windows remain, one in each of the rooms on either side of the altar.

The furnishings are mostly original, and were purchased from a source in Quebec. The altar, the sacred vessels, vestments, pulpit, baptismal font, stations, communion rail, candle holders, and organ were paid for by individuals, families, or groups. The church has a seating capacity of about 230. The pews were numbered at first, and families paid a stipend for their use. Some of these faded numbers can still be seen, and are indicated

by the ★ symbols on the map. (The above excerpts were taken from the *St. Mary's Polish Church History 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book*)

## Main Level (the Nave)

**1** **Above** is a plaque donated by the St. Michael's Polish Benefit Society in commemoration of the Millennium Anniversary of Christianity in Poland (1966). **Below** is a wooden box which in the past held Catholic Bulletins which could be purchased by donating a small fee. To the **Right**, as you face the entrance, a small white statuette of St. Mary offers holy water, used by the faithful to make the Sign of the Cross.

**2** On the **Left** is a framed list of names, recognizing the young men of the parish who were volunteers in Canada's wartime Fighting Forces. On the **Right** is a painting depicting a scene from the Book of Revelation, of St. Michael defeating the dragon (representative of Satan). In Roman Catholicism, St. Michael is considered to be a guardian of the church and a patron of the ill and injured.

The painting was commissioned by Peggy Ryba and Betty Breski, in memory of their husbands Walter Ryba and Frank Breski, both past presidents of the St. Michael's Polish Benefit Society. It was painted by local artist Jan Gyorfi.

**3** This stained glass window is one of eight, which each depict a scene containing St. Mary. At the bottom of each window is a dedication in Polish, **Na Pamiatke** (In Memory of). This particular representation is known as *The Sacred Heart of Mary, The Immaculate Heart of Mary, or The*

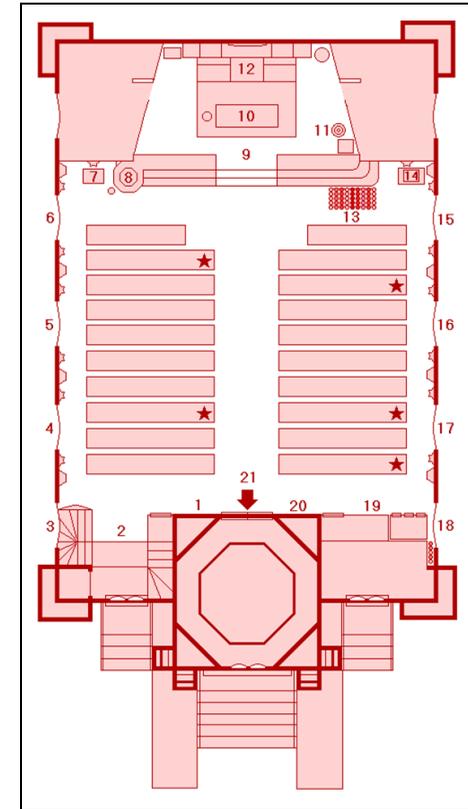
*Maternal Heart of Mary*. The shining heart is representative of her internal goodness.

**4** This window depicts *the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. This scene depicts Mary ascending into heaven.

**5** This window depicts St. Anne teaching the Virgin Mary how to read. St. Anne and the Virgin Mary are often placed in a setting under a tree. This stems from the belief that St. Anne saw a bird feeding its young, while sitting in the shade of a tree, which caused her to desire to have a child of her own.

**6** This window depicts *the Nativity Scene*. Some people may mistakenly identify the shepherd in this window as Joseph. However, the presence of the shepherd's crook (the curved stick) and the absence of a halo around the male figure, assures that this is indeed a shepherd.

**7** Above the shrine is a painting of *the Divine Mercy*. Blue represents water which cleanses the soul. Red represents blood which leads to Salvation. This shrine is dedicated to Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska of Poland (1905-1938), a nun who received visions from Jesus Christ. The blue case on the table houses a bone fragment from one of her fingers, and was commissioned by Peggy Ryba in memory of her second husband, Jerry Travis. The Holy See restricted the Divine Mercy devotion in 1959. Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (who later became Pope John Paul II) asked in 1977 that the restriction be lifted, and in 1978 the Prefect proclaimed it no longer binding. The statuette of Sister Faustina is holding



## Extend Your Visit

Thank you for visiting St. Mary's Polish Parish today. We appreciate your interest in the church and hope that you enjoyed your visit.

If you would like to continue your tour of the church, and the Polish community in Cape Breton, please visit our website. Featuring photos and events, as well as an extended church history, our website is the perfect place to seek out more information.

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This material was produced in conjunction with East and Central European Communities and Cultures in Cape Breton, a SSHRC funded research project, supported by Cape Breton University.

a miniaturized replica of the painting above.

The painting of the Divine Mercy was commissioned by Edward Ryba in memory of his father Walter Ryba, and was painted by a parishioner, John Tynski. The statuette of Saint Faustina was donated by Dorothy Rozeluk. Father Tadeusz Rusnak obtained the white altar, also commissioned by Edward Ryba in memory of his father.

**8** This pulpit is used by clergy before the Second Vatican Council to preach the Gospel or the sermon. Affixed to the pulpit is a painting of Blessed Pope John Paul II, a revered son of the Polish nation. Members of the parish met with the Holy Father in Halifax in 1984. To the left is a vessel with holy water.

The painting of Pope John Paul II was commissioned by Mary Pierrynowski and Agnes Stephenson, in memory of their parents Stefan and Maria Wróblewski, to commemorate the first Polish Pope. Like the portrait of St. Michael and the dragon, it was painted by local artist Jan Gyorf.

### The Sanctuary

**9** This area of the church is distinctly separate from the Nave. Traditionally, the sanctuary is elevated on a dais, separated from the main floor by three steps. The room on the left is called the Sacristy. The room on the right is called the Vestry, and is used by members of the clergy to don vestments before the Mass. The banners mounted on the walls to the left and the right are used in processions. Notice that the marble used in the communion railings and

on the pulpit is actually painted wood.

**10** The altar is the table on the raised dais, used by the clergy to prepare communion. To the left is the stand which holds the processional cross which is carried down the main aisle to the altar. To the right is the lectern, used by members of the congregation (lectors) and the celebrant (priest) to proclaim readings and the Gospel, and to deliver the homily.

**11** This tri-curved dome is actually a bell. During the Mass, the bell is hit by the altar server with a mallet three times to venerate the host.

**12** This structure, which houses several statuettes was restored by Rose Gniewek, a former member of the parish. The Last Supper sculpture required special attention, as parts of the sculpture had broken, and so were remolded. At the **Forward Front** is the Tabernacle which houses the Sacramental Wine and Communion Wafers. **Left** is a statue of St. Stanislaus. The **Center** statue is of the Madonna and child. **Right** is a statue of St. Joseph. On either end are generic statues of Angels. To the **left of the structure** is a small preparation table. To the **right of the structure** is the Baptistry.

**13** These candles are used in memory prayers, or to request a favour. Once lit, they are left to burn entirely through. The statuette on the wall behind them is of the *Sacred Heart of Jesus*.

**14** Above the shrine is a replica painting of *Our Lady of Czestochowa*, by John Tynski. Also

known as *the Black Madonna*, this icon is housed at the Jasna Góra Monastery in Częstochowa, Poland. During an attack on the monastery in 1430, this painting was taken and placed in a cart. The horse attached to the cart refused to move, and in their fury, one of the thieves stabbed the portrait twice through the cheekbone of the Virgin. When the thief tried to inflict the image a third time, he fell to the ground and died. This icon is also thought to have protected the monastery from another invasion in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

This shrine is representative of the tomb of Jesus. On Holy Thursday, the main altar is stripped, and communion is placed in the shrine Tabernacle. On Good Friday, a statue of the body of Christ (the Passion) is placed inside the Tomb of Jesus.

**15** This window depicts *Christ is King*. Above the Madonna and child is a six pointed red star; the star represents the House of David and the colour red represents blood. In his hand, Christ holds a ball, which signifies his power as the son of God. The lilies at Mary's feet represent virginity and purity, and signify that she is the Mother of God.

**16** This window depicts Mary holding the body of Jesus after his crucifixion. Often in this representation, the figure of Christ does not reveal signs of The Passion, neither in his face or body. That is because this particular image is a replica of Michaelangelo's *Pieta*, in which he purposefully leaves out any signs of The Passion, because he did not wish his art of Christ to depict death.

**17** This window depicts the biblical scene *Mary visits Elizabeth*.

Traditionally, it is Elizabeth who falls to her feet upon seeing Mary. Here it is Mary who is depicted kneeling, feeling the stomach of Elizabeth after her baby moves with the Holy Spirit upon hearing Mary's voice.

**18** This final window is a representation of *the Annunciation of Mary*. Mary stands waiting and praying in a field under a wide sky. The dove represents the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, who bathes Mary in its light.

**19** To the **right** is the enclosed confessional, used for the Sacrament of Penance. The priest enters the center door, the penitnant usually enter on either side. On the **left** is a storage closet, inside which the original wainscotting of the church may be seen.

**20** A tribute to Rev. Leo O'Connell, pastor, 1929-69. He learned Polish and was deeply respected.

**21** Inside the Narthex (the entry way) of the church is a window with a colourful depiction of the Holy Cross. This was also commissioned by Mary Pierrynowski and Agnes Stephenson, in memory of their parents Stefan and Maria Wróblewski. This window depicts a tall cross superimposed by a white "trinitas unitas", an ancient Christian symbol that represents the unity, the equality, and the co-eternity of the Trinity. The background is infused with numerous white pods in a moving pattern, that may be interpreted as souls aspiring towards the grace emanating from the Trinity. An Angel statuette offers Holy Water to parishioners. Above is the Choir and the Belfry, both closed to the general public.



### WITAMY! Welcome!

We welcome you to *Parafia p.w. Najświętszej Maryi Panny* or St. Mary's Polish Parish (Roman Catholic). Whatever your church, faith, or reason for visiting, we are pleased to share our home with you. Our doors are open to both worshipers and visitors. St. Mary's Polish Church is Atlantic Canada's only Polish church and is a provincially designated heritage property. All are welcome here to learn more of our unique history.

### History of the Church

The birthday of Mary, Mother of Jesus, is observed on September 8<sup>th</sup>. It was on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1913, that the cornerstone was blessed and the Polish Church of the nativity of St. Mary, as yet just a covered basement, was officially opened.

A roof was built on the basement and used as the church as the community raised funds to build further. For many years, the spacious grassy area around the church was the site of successful annual bazaars, and is still the site of the annual Cape Breton Polish Festival. These fundraising events provided entertainment and social activity for parishioners and all who attended.

After the St. Michael's Polish Benefit Society was founded in 1909, its leaders focused on helping the Polish people and