



## SS. Cyril & Methodius Catholic Parish

**608 Sobieski Street  
Lemont, Illinois 60439**

On November 23, 1882, the Archbishop of Chicago, the Most Rev. Patrick Augustine Feehan, commissioned Father Leopold Bonaventura Maria Moczygemba, the pastor of St. Alphonsus Church in Lemont, to organize a new parish to serve the spiritual and cultural needs of Lemont's increasing Polish community. The site selected by Father Moczygemba for the new parish consisted of 10 acres and was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Murray who sold the land for \$2,000. Father Moczygemba gave the name of "Jasna Gora," popularly known as "Blue Hill," to the site, dedicating it to Our Lady of Czestochowa, the patroness of his native Poland. The land was later subdivided into the "Jasna Gora Subdivision" and title was transferred to the Catholic Bishop of Chicago on January 8, 1884.

A general meeting of all parishioners was held during the first week of June, 1883, at which time it was decided to immediately proceed with the building of the new church and school to be called SS. Cyril & Methodius (SSCM). Monsignor Patrick J. Conway, Vicar General of the Archdiocese, officiated at the laying of the cornerstone on August 12, 1883, and the church and school were completed by April of 1884. The frame church was built on a Lemont limestone foundation and measured 119 feet by 56 feet. The church and its choir loft could seat 775 people. Father Moczygemba offered the first Mass on Palm Sunday, April 6, 1884. His Excellency, Archbishop Patrick A. Feehan, blessed the new church and frame school on Sunday, August 31, 1884.



*Original SS. Cyril & Methodius Church and belfry*

On December 10th, 1886, a plot of ground measuring 360 by 484 feet was purchased as the site of the SS. Cyril and Methodius Parish Cemetery. The center gate on State Street has a plaque reading "A.D. 1886." SS. Cyril & Methodius Cemetery is the chosen resting place for many generations of parishioners, priests and sisters. The very first burial was thought to be April 1, 1887. Per Catholic Cemeteries as of May 2009, there have been approximately 2,900 burials and the cemetery is almost at capacity.



*St. Cyril's Cemetery gate on State Street*

On March 29, 1898, a fire broke out in the store of Peter Madaj, which was located across the street from the school, and a violent north wind carried the flames across the street to the frame school building, burning it to the ground. Following the destruction of the school, a new school built of Lemont limestone donated by one of the quarries located near Lemont was constructed during Father Candid Kozlowski's tenure as pastor.

*SS. Cyril & Methodius limestone school*



A central heating system was installed in the school in 1911, and in that same year, electricity was brought into all of the parish buildings. The church was equipped with a central heating system the following year. Signor Giusti, a well-known Italian artist completed the painting of scriptural scenes on the walls of the church in May, 1914.

The W.U. Gas Company made gas available to all residents of the subdivision of "Jasna Gora" in November of 1921. And in January and February of 1922, these same residents excavated a ditch 2,000 feet long and 5 feet deep to obtain their water supply from the lower town. They installed a central drainage system, using eight-inch pipe, 896 feet in length, connected to the Lemont disposal plant. To prevent the incessant erosion on top of the hill, residents built a wall three feet high and 287 feet in length on the south side, 222 feet on the west side.

In July, 1925, a meeting of all parish groups and organizations was held and it was unanimously agreed that the former convent quarters on the top floor of the school be converted into additional classrooms and a new convent should be built. On the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 1926, the Sisters moved into their new home which was blessed on Sunday, May 30, 1926.



Tragedy again struck the parish on Ash Wednesday, February 22, 1928. Between the hours of four and six in the morning, both the church and rectory burned to the ground.

*Ruins of Church after 1928 fire*

The parishioners of St. Patrick's of Lemont graciously allowed the stricken parishioners of St. Cyril's to conduct services in their church and Mrs. L. Hoinacki made her residence available to the homeless pastor, Father Henry Jagodzinski.

The architectural firm of E. Brielmaier and Sons of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was hired to draw plans for a new church and rectory. On October 28, 1928, a contract in the amount of \$177,000 was signed with The Local Construction Company for this project. The foundations and floors of the buildings were laid by the 14th of December, 1928; however, the severe winter interrupted further progress, and it was not until April 21, 1929, that the laying of the cornerstone in the church took place.

*Laying of the cornerstone of current SS. Cyril & Methodius Church*



The rectory was made ready for occupancy on July 31, 1929, and on January 1, 1930, at 5:00 a.m., the first Mass in the new church was celebrated by the Pastor, Father Henry Jagodzinski. The church organ was blessed on May 30, 1930. On that same day, the choirs of six parishes gave a concert of religious music to commemorate the occasion.

*First picture after construction of current church*

The Golden Jubilee of the parish was acknowledged by the celebration of a special Mass on April 8, 1934.

On July 9, 1942, after serving as pastor of St. Cyril's for 29 years, Father Henry Jagodzinski was transferred to St. Salomea Parish in Chicago. The parishioners recognized they owed a great debt of gratitude to Father Jagodzinski whose remarkable courage and foresight erected the "Little Cathedral on Blue Hill." Father Jagodzinski was succeeded by the Rev. Leo Hinc, but because of ill health, Father Hinc was forced to resign the pastorate only a few weeks after being appointed. On July 27, 1942, His Excellency, Archbishop Samuel Stritch, assigned the Rev. Ladislaus J. Nosal, a young, energetic priest as pastor of St. Cyril's.

In the same year that he was appointed, Father Nosal initiated a drive to obtain and install stained glass windows in the church, and these beautiful and colorful windows remain as a permanent testimonial to the parishioners' devotion and generosity. In 1943, a beautiful shrine dedicated to our Lady of Perpetual Help was constructed in the chapel at the northeast corner of the church in honor of all parishioners serving in the armed forces.

*Saints Cyril & Methodius stained glass window on west side of church*



The years 1945 to 1952 brought many new improvements to the parish. New stokers were installed in the church, school, rectory and convent. The 1950 parking lot was graded and black-topped, as were the driveways to the garage, convent and rectory.



In an impressive ceremony that took place in the parish hall on Sunday, February 10, 1952, the \$90,000 mortgage paper for the church was burned. A new roof was put on the church and the exteriors of the church, rectory and convent were renovated in June and July, 1952. A wrought iron railing at the entrance of the church was donated by Father Nosal.

*Burning of Church Mortgage 1952*

On August 20, 1956, the church bells tolled the distressing news that Father Nosal had been called by God to his eternal reward. Father Vincent Sekulski was appointed as pastor in 1956. He primarily concerned himself with increasing the school building fund and obtaining permission from Archbishop Samuel Cardinal Stritch, to build a sorely needed modern school and gymnasium. It appeared however that God had other plans for this zealous priest. Father Vince died on June 17, 1957.

Rev. Julius Gilewski then became pastor and took up the work started by Father Sekulski. In January of 1958, a two-story building directly across the street from the church at 601 Sobieski (Fabek's store) was purchased and a formal School Building Fundraising Campaign was inaugurated. Men of the parish organized into a campaign committee, visited all parishioners and obtained pledges amounting to about \$100,000.



*Construction of brick school in 1959*

In June of 1959, His Excellency Albert G. Meyer, Archbishop of Chicago, granted permission to build a ten classroom school and gymnasium at an estimated cost of \$340,000. Ground-breaking ceremonies took place on Sunday, August 2, 1959 and all foundations were completed by the first week in October. The students of St. Cyril's had full use of the modern school facilities in September, 1960, and the school was dedicated and blessed by His Excellency Archbishop Albert Cardinal Meyer on September 11, 1960.

The 1960 school year saw the beginning of St. Cyril's basketball program. Initially, the program consisted of three teams; the Angels (6th grade), the Saints (7th grade) and the Comets (8th grade). The program expanded and continues today, highlighted each year by the Emil Domagalski tournament, named after the founder of the athletic program.

The original shrine of Our Lady of Grace, located on Ledochowski Street, was built by parish volunteers, constructed of stones from the old limestone school and completed in November, 1968. A Parish Council was formally organized and its first meeting was held on February 11, 1969.

In 1971, after 1700 years, the Church reactivated the role of Deacon and a formal two-year training program was started to train selected laymen to become ordained deacons of the Church. Mr. Norbert Lesnieski of SS. Cyril and Methodius answered the call of the Church and became the first ordained Deacon in Lemont in December, 1972. Mr. Gilbert Ende, also of St. Cyril's entered the program in September, 1977 and was ordained a Deacon on December 16, 1979. After formal training, on September 12, 1971, three lay members of the parish were commissioned to be St. Cyril's first Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. Also in 1971, Rev. Gilewski, with the assistance of the Parish Council, oversaw the repainting of the interior of the church.

After having served the parish for 17 years as pastor, Rev. Julius Gilewski reached the age of retirement. Rev. Richard Jozwiak was assigned as the new pastor and assumed his position in July, 1974. Father Gilewski continued to reside at St. Cyril's as Pastor emeritus. Many new programs began, including the "Helping Hands" food pantry to help the needy of the community, with the aid of parish donations of canned foods. A Liturgical Decorating Committee was organized to decorate the church for holiday liturgical services. Sadly, on Christmas Day, 1978, Father Julius Gilewski passed on to his heavenly reward after 48 years of priesthood.

In June of 1979, Rev. Edward Witusik, a LaSalette priest, was assigned as an associate pastor of SS. Cyril and Methodius. Father Witusik was the editor of *Polslaniec*, the LaSalette Fathers' Polish magazine. He also wrote a weekly Polish column for the *Chicago Catholic*. Because Father Jozwiak

was interested in preserving the culture and heritage of the Poles, a Polish Mass was introduced. Father Witusik organized the Polish Club of Lemont, which flourishes to this day.

The group began for Polish-speaking parishioners and others wishing to keep in touch with their Polish heritage, and to offer a stepping stone to those immigrating to the United States. Their mission is to uphold the traditions, customs and language of the Polish people, continue to strengthen and unite the Polish community and its Catholic roots, and help new immigrants assimilate into their new home and country. They encourage and support the John Paul II Polish School of Lemont, and help sustain Polish culture and dance. Polish classes are offered to children and adults who wish to learn more about Polish culture, history, language and geography. The school provides nurturing and support to our Polish-American students and their families.



*Polish  
Dancers*



From 1975 to 1984, much rejuvenation, remodeling and repair took place in the church, convent, rectory and school. A washroom was installed in the church by volunteers. Electronic vigil lights were installed to replace the paraffin candles. A new roof was put on the church in September of 1977, padded kneelers were installed and a new sacristy roof put on. At the 5:30 p.m. Mass on April 26, 1980, Father Jozwiak conducted a ceremony burning the school mortgage, proudly announcing that the parish debt had been paid off. In August of 1983 the entire top portion of the church was tuckpointed and redecorating of the church interior began. Energy efficient fluorescent fixtures were installed by volunteers in the school building.

On May 28, 1984, His Eminence, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin presided as the main celebrant at a concelebrated Mass marking the 100th birthday of SS. Cyril and Methodius parish. A banquet celebration followed at the Joliet Renaissance Center.

School improvements continued with the addition of new windows in 1988, formally naming the gymnasium the Father Gilewski Center in 1989, installing air-conditioning for the classrooms in 1991, a new gym floor and the Father Richard Jozwiak computer lab.

The parish and school of SS. Cyril and Methodius had been served from its inception in 1884 by the Felician Sisters. Their dedication, example and service were instrumental in the formation of the parish and school. In 1992, after 108 years of ministry and after touching the lives of thousands of parishioners, the Felician Sisters were no longer able to serve the parish due to declining numbers in their order.

On September 1, 1992, Father Richard Jozwiak began his retirement after 18 years as pastor. Cardinal Bernardin appointed Rev. Victor Sivore as the new pastor and he was installed in September of that year.

Starting in 1995, and then continuing into the next decade, the parish wisely began purchasing additional houses and property on the east side of Ledochowski Street, with plans for much-needed annex office/meeting space and future parking areas.

Because of the significant increase in the school population, an addition to the school building became necessary. With the addition, the school has classrooms to accommodate two classes of each grade. New office facilities, library, computer lab and meeting facilities were added. The new addition was dedicated on Sunday, August 24, 1997 by the Most Reverend Bishop Gorman.



*Front of current school with 1997 addition*



Highlighting the 1999 year was the unveiling and enshrining of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa (The Black Madonna) at a Mass on August 15 presided over by His Eminence, Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I. Made for SS. Cyril and Methodius by Hinsdale artist Zygmunt Kimel, the icon had been taken to Rome and was blessed by Pope John Paul II previous to the Mass. The icon was also taken in pilgrimage to Czestochowa, Poland, home of the original icon of Our Lady of Jasna Gora/Czestochowa.

*Our Lady of Czestochowa Icon/Shrine*

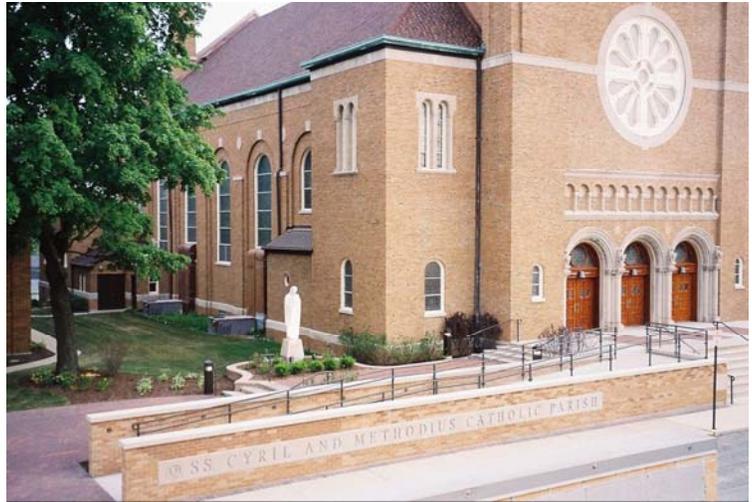
In January 2001, Fr. Sivore passed away, and Rev. Lawrence Lisowski was appointed as the new pastor in July. He was installed by Bishop Gorman in October of 2001. Fr. Lisowski began spearheading many new projects, planning future renovations and rejuvenating parish life.

In the summer of 2002, after an inspection by the Archdiocese of Chicago, it was determined that the aging convent building was no longer safe for occupancy. For 77 years, it had housed the Felician Sisters, and later the kindergarten and pre-school classrooms, as well as offices for religious education. The convent's demolition brought a chapter of our parish history to a close. The cornerstone of the Sisters' convent was saved and remains on the parish property as a permanent remembrance to honor all that the Sisters have done for SS. Cyril & Methodius parishioners.

In the fall of 2002, the parish began participation in the Archdiocesan capital campaign called "Sharing Christ's Gifts." A large emphasis of the 3 year, \$2.5 million stewardship project involved preserving our historic parish buildings. Work commenced on the exterior walls and roofs of all the

campus buildings. Many repairs, restorations and renovations were completed on our beautiful church, particularly a total renovation of the bell tower and Rose window.

The year 2004 was a special milestone, as we honored our past 120 years of parish life and celebrated the 75th anniversary of our present church building. A weekend of special festivities was held in August of 2004, with the theme of “We remember, we celebrate, we believe.” A special Mass was held on August 21 with Bishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller blessing the beautiful new enlarged church entrance.



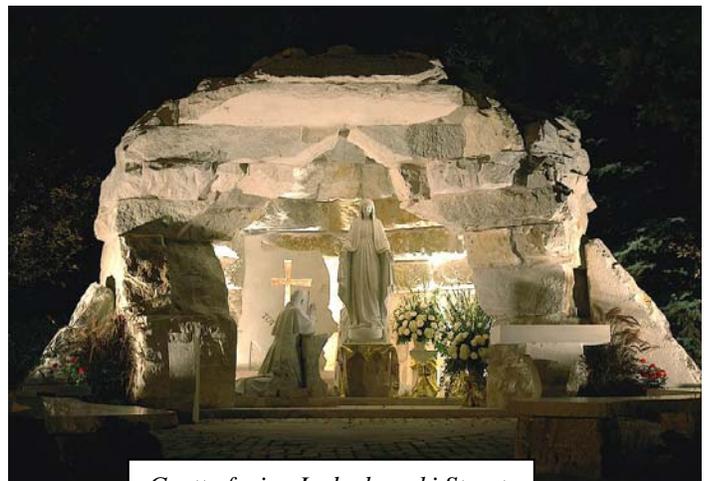
*Ramp and entrance along Sobieski Street*

In 2006, the section of Sobieski Street which runs east and west between the church and school was given the name “Honorary Pope John Paul II Way.”

*Honorary sign on Sobieski Street*



On May 4, 2008, a redesigned grotto replacing the original one was blessed by Cardinal George. Our parish’s original Our Lady of Grace Marian statue and some of the original limestone pieces were incorporated in the site. Polish artist/architect Andrzej Urbanczyk designed the new grotto and carved the Pope’s statue. The shrine now features the statue of Pope John Paul II praying to Mary in front of a piece of stone cut into the shape of the map of Poland. Carved into the stone are a cross and the Pope’s apostolic motto: “Totus Tuus,” (totally yours).



*Grotto facing Ledochowski Street*



The year 2009 was a special year-long jubilee celebration as Father Lisowski led the parish in celebrating 125 years of parish life.

*2009 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Jubilee year events*



On August 16, 2009, a parish ‘Unity’ mass was held outdoors to help celebrate our past, present, and future as a parish family. The main celebrant was Bishop Thomas Paprocki. It was celebrated as one bilingual mass for the weekend, for all parishioners to join together in one place, at one time, as one body.

On September 13, 2009, the grotto’s altar was consecrated by Ukrainian Archbishop Mieczyslaw Mokrzycki, in conjunction with celebrating the Polish Club of Lemont’s 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

On October 24, 2009, a 125th parish anniversary jubilee mass was celebrated by Bishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller to commemorate our 125 years of being a parish community. During the mass, the church’s new pipe organ was blessed and following the mass, a gala dinner-dance was held at the Willowbrook ballroom.

A sign of a successful parish is growth. There were approximately 490 founding families in 1884. They were local Lemont families and other families of Polish descent from the surrounding towns. In 1984 the parish census was 766 families. In 1992 it was 1,047 families, and in 1997, 1,503 families. In 2010, approximately 2,400 registered families now call St. Cyril’s their spiritual home. This is witness to the strong Catholic presence in the Village of Lemont.

SS. Cyril and Methodius School is an important ministry of the parish and is committed to teaching the Catholic faith while fostering leadership, integrity and respect in our future adults. The school provides an excellent Catholic education from kindergarten through eighth grade in a compassionate environment that strives to develop each student spiritually, academically, physically, and emotionally. Daily classroom religious instruction, sacramental preparation, participation in weekly masses and special liturgies, classroom service projects and faith partner activities enhance students' spiritual growth.



*A primary grade classroom*



*School mass*

St. Cyril's School boasts an advanced academic curriculum enhanced by computer and science labs along with a multi-media learning resource center. The dedicated and experienced faculty is recognized for their teaching excellence - they strive to meet the needs of all students.



*All-school picture taken in 2009*

In addition, the school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including band, chess, First Lego League, talent show and school musical. These opportunities help to foster self-esteem and maturity. An outstanding athletic program includes basketball, volleyball, cheerleading and football.

A strong Religious Education program also exists, involving 60 support staff members and 44 catechists to teach over 600 students. Our Religious Education program recognizes the need for students to reflect on the experience of Jesus in their own lives, to speak the faith they share, and to relate to one another so that the Word of God becomes present when they gather in Christ's name.



*Children in Religious Education class projects*

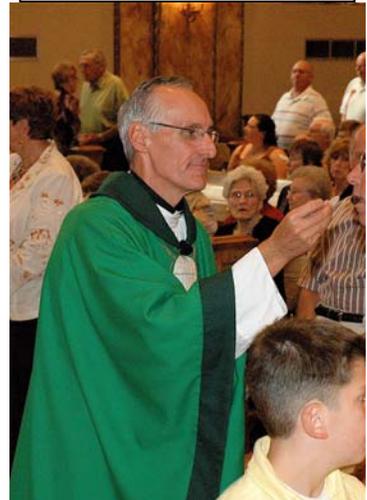


As a vital and vibrant parish community, opportunities abound for all who wish to be of service. Numerous ministries such as Bereavement, Catholic Charities, Habitat for Humanity, Helping Hands, Liturgy, Ministry of Care, Music, Peace & Justice, R.C.I.A., Respect Life, SPRED, St. Adalbert's Sharing Parish, Tree of Love, Young Adult and Youth Ministry, cover a wide range of issues. In addition, parish organizations & committees such as Altar & Rosary Society, Art & Environment, Athletic Commission, Beat the Lotto, Block Party, Finance, Golf Outing, Holy Name Society, Mothers' Club, News from the Pews, Parish Council, Polish Club of Lemont, Religious Education Board, School Board, Unity, Welcoming and Wellness offer a variety of choices to fulfill many interests. Parishioners volunteer countless hours as baptismal prep leaders, bulletin stuffers, cantors, catechists, coaches, extraordinary ministers of communion, instrumentalists, lectors, Pre-Cana facilitators, rectory assistants, ushers, church and wedding sacristans, and in any other areas of need within our parish church, school, or the Religious Education program.



*A baptism at St. Cyril's*

*Distributing Communion*



Our 'Parish Mission Statement' affirms that we are a family of faith, entrusted with the gospel message of Jesus Christ. Rooted in a rich tradition of worship, service and prayer, we foster the unity and faith of this community. Enlivened by the Spirit, we share our gifts, talents and resources to bring about the Kingdom of God.

*Ash Wednesday*

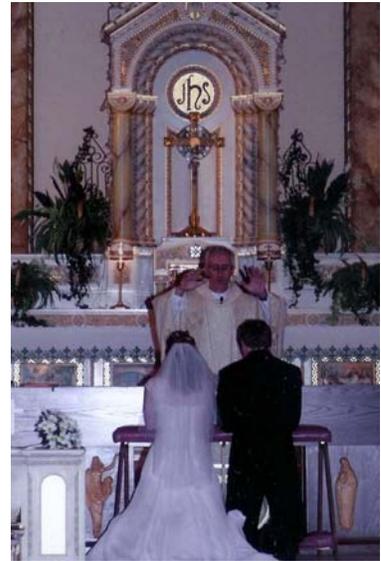


*Palm Sunday*



*Christmas at St. Cyril's*

*Weddings*



The Parish Staff of SS. Cyril & Methodius welcomes all to our historic parish that has carried on the mission of Jesus since 1884. Please visit our web-site at [www.stcyril.org](http://www.stcyril.org) for more information.