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Built on Sacrifice Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish—A Polish-American Catholic Community in Pittsburgh

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Prologue

Immaculate Heart of Mary Church has sat nestled on a narrow street halfway up Pittsburgh’s Polish Hill since 1904. This Polish ethnic church is difficult to miss for people driving just below the Hill or in any aerial photography of Pittsburgh. Immaculate Heart’s size and ornate decorations overwhelm its surrounding working class environment. Modeled after the Basilica in Rome, her three prominent domes stand as beacons to all Pittsburgh, constantly reminding the Steel City of its Eastern European and Catholic heritage. As the church’s physical appearance draws attention away from the rest of Polish Hill, Immaculate Heart of Mary Church acts as the focal point of Polish Hill’s community. It represents the heart of the Polish Americans’ lives. Who are the people that struggled to build this magnificent monument to God amid an urban working class environment and how has their community developed since then?

During Carnegie Mellon University’s History Workshop course, I completed a historical research project concerning the Eastern European ethnic parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh. I wanted to explore further the various social and cultural dynamics present in a religious community based upon a common ethnicity. The College of Humanities and Social Sciences Honors Thesis Program has allowed me to continue my research. By studying a specific community of common ethnicity and religion over time, I could combine my interests of anthropology, history, and religious studies.

Established a century ago, Immaculate Heart of Mary Polish ethnic parish posed the best opportunity as the principal community for my Honors Thesis research project. Immaculate Heart of Mary parish has remained a community primarily composed of parishioners of Polish-American descent. Recently, the Diocese of Pittsburgh has moved toward consolidating many ethnic based parishes and non-ethnic based parishes. Many Eastern European ethnic parishes have experienced merging with parishes of mixed ethnicity. Subsequently, these parishes are losing their community’s common ethnic base. Immaculate Heart of Mary Church struggled to avoid
consolidation and was able to remain intact. By studying Immaculate Heart of Mary parish as opposed to a combined parish, I gained a clearer picture of how time has shaped the Hill’s Polish American community.

As a result, this study compares Immaculate Heart of Mary Church’s original founding community with its contemporary parish community. It explores how Polish Hill residents defined themselves and related to one another in the context of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church both today and yesterday. A religious organization necessarily creates a community base as its members hold mutual spiritual beliefs. These common religious beliefs join people in a community bond that can be observed through various religious rituals and social activities of the organization. Similarly, a common ethnic heritage creates an instant link between people based on their sociocultural similarities. Immaculate Heart of Mary parish holds a community base stemming from both a mutual ethnicity and mutual religious beliefs. Over time, these common Polish and Catholic backgrounds have blended to create a strongly cohesive and interdependent community upon Pittsburgh’s Polish Hill. Through determination and self-sacrifice, this unique community has and continues to focus on preserving their solidarity within these communal bonds.

**Methodology**

Over the past three months, I have been immersed in ethnographic and historical research of the Polish-American Catholic community which make up Immaculate Heart of Mary parish and its surrounding neighborhood of Polish Hill. As a practicing Catholic, I felt an immediate connection to Immaculate Heart of Mary’s parish community through our common faith. I have experienced being a member of a Catholic parish community. My Catholic background supplied me with an “insider’s” understanding of the procedures and meanings behind Mass and certain other religious rituals at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. However, although I participate in Catholic rituals weekly, I have never belonged to a parish based on common ethnicity. I wondered how the aspect of a common Polish heritage affected the social relations within Immaculate Heart’s parish community. With my past experiences in a non-ethnic based parish, I felt I could recognize more readily the differences between my home parish and Immaculate Heart’s parish. In this way, I could observe the influence a common cultural background has on a religious community’s social structure and how that community defines itself.

To understand the past and present sociocultural relations within Immaculate Heart of Mary’s parish community, I engaged in several different research methods. In terms of historical research, I have delved into the Diocesan Archives and Record Center of the Roman Catholic Diocese of
Pittsburgh as well as Immaculate Heart’s personal trove of historical documents. Using past parish bulletins, parish histories, letters and newspaper articles, I have been able to piece together an understanding of Immaculate Heart’s early years of formation. In addition, interviewing various parishioners has granted me access to their memories surrounding the parish community. Although memories are always tempered over time, they offer a unique insight into what parishioners assign importance to in their community. The oral histories reveal people’s attitudes and understandings central to their identities as members of the Polish Hill community. In addition, memories expose the parishioners’ current feelings about the modern parish community. Many elderly church members look back with nostalgia at days when all generations of Immaculate Heart would participate actively in church affairs. This reflects the current lack of interest by third and fourth generation church members as well as the older members’ subsequent disappointment about this.

Interviewing also represents an integral part of my ethnographic research methods. My research has focused on gaining input from parish community members concerning their contemporary attitudes and feelings about the Polish Hill community. In this way, I can explore their personal understandings of what community means, especially in the religious context of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. The nuances of speech and body language during an interview give clues to the informant’s general feelings surrounding Immaculate Heart’s parish community. I implored informants to speak candidly about topics they found pertinent to themselves and Immaculate Heart’s community. Occasionally, I prompted the informant for more information on a particular subject holding special interest for me.

Two primary informants have supplied me with much information concerning Immaculate Heart of Mary’s parish community and the Polish Hill neighborhood. Reverend Joseph E. Swierczynski, the current pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary, welcomed me in to study the parish community. Although he has been at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish for only two months, Reverend Swierczynski willingly added his fresh perspective to my knowledge about the ethnic parish. A gentle priest of Polish-American ethnicity, Reverend Swierczynski is affectionately referred to as “Father Joe” by Immaculate Heart parishioners. This familiarity may result from Father Joe’s resemblance to their retired pastor, Father John Jendzura. Father John served Immaculate Heart of Mary Church for over thirty years and he was much loved among the parishioners. Immaculate Heart’s new pastor Father Joe, like Father John, represents a “gentle yet strong father figure.” Various parishioners expressed their ability to speak in confidence about personal concerns with Father Joe. While Father Joe has a calming demeanor and a low voice in one-on-one conversations, he projects himself firmly while celebrating Mass. He stands as a strong and respected leader of Immaculate Heart of Mary’s parish community.
My other primary informant, Cheryl Barry, has been a member of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church all her life. She attended its school, worked as a teacher there, and now acts as Principal for the Immaculate Heart of Mary School. As Principal and a member of the Parish Council, she plays an active role in parish life. During the interview, her demeanor struck me as open and easy-going. Her words and facial expressions revealed her close personal ties to the church and school. She spoke about her feelings concerning the changes of the school’s surrounding community. Throughout her lifetime, Cheryl has witnessed both long-standing community solidarity and occasional conflict among the people of Polish Hill. Like Father Joe, Cheryl Barry acts as a strong leader in Immaculate Heart’s parish community. She helps coordinate Immaculate Heart’s weekly BINGO night which benefits the parochial school. At Church BINGO, the parishioners show much love and respect toward her. She symbolizes the vital link between Immaculate Heart of Mary Church and its school.

Besides interviewing, I have performed more observational fieldwork for my research project, including recording the behaviors of and relations between parishioners at various social and religious functions. On my first night of serious observational research, I attended Immaculate Heart’s Church BINGO night. Upon entering Rosary Hall that Friday night, I felt all eyes of the players on me. Although well over forty people attended BINGO, they all recognized me as an outsider. I revealed my own Catholic and working class background within the course of my conversations with the players to ease the tensions of my new face. My regular attendance at Sunday Mass, especially the Polish Mass, has also aided my entrance into Immaculate Heart’s parish community.

At parish social and religious functions, I have attempted to blend into the background, recording the behaviors of and relations between parishioners in my little notebook. I have noted their demeanor around one another, the conversational material which arises between them, and the general feelings and attitudes noticeable within the functions’ environment.

The manner in which parishioners address and talk to one another reveals much about community relations. For instance, humor is often a boundary breaker between people. It can encourage familiarity and cohesion. As a result, frequent group jokes and puns would reveal a sense of cohesion among the parishioners. Frequently, inside jokes would pass among Bingo players during the lull between games. Mutual agreement on religious and political topics of conversation also points to common group values and beliefs which promote a group cohesion.

Not only do words reveal Polish Hill’s closely connected community, but also the member’s actions. Body language at rituals and social events expose much about the relationships among Immaculate Heart’s parishioners. For example, after one Sunday Polish Mass, two older women were conversing with one of Immaculate Heart’s resident priests. During the conversation, the three exchanged an embrace. When greeting each other
before the English Mass, many parishioners clasped hands or patted each other’s backs. These signs of familiarity among community members present close bonds throughout the parish community. Other physical actions exchanged between parishioners include pats on the back, relaxed body movements, and handshakes. By combining the aforementioned fieldworking techniques and historical methods, I can formulate conclusions about the past and present understandings of parish members concerning Immaculate Heart’s community.

Setting the Foundations . . .

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the new immigration surge from Eastern Europe brought the first recognizable Polish community to Pittsburgh. As Russian and other foreign states occupied the Polish land, its people experienced forced attempts of “de-Polonization” on their culture.3 Poverty reigned among peasants as their livelihood, Poland’s agricultural economy, began to tumble. Fleeing from the socioeconomic oppressions of their Mother Country Poland, the immigrants came in droves to America. Many Polish immigrants settled in Pittsburgh along the strip in Lawrenceville and eventually on Polish Hill (then referred to as “the Hill” or Herron Hill).4 The first residents of Polish Hill set out to preserve their Polish ethnicity within the religious structure of the Roman Catholic Church. “Eager to stamp upon their children the faith and language of their forefathers, the people of Herron Hill were desirous of a church and a school which they could call their own.”5 With these founding goals in mind, the residents of Polish Hill petitioned the Bishop for permission to organize a Polish ethnic parish. Established in 1897, Immaculate Heart of Mary parish represented a place “where free from their oppressors, they (the Polish parishioners) could freely think, pray, speak, and confess in their vernacular.”6

The Church became Polish Hill’s community center; the place where its people gathered to worship, learn, and enjoy social activities. For instance, Immaculate Heart offered various social and religious activities for the Polish community to share in.7 Early priests and parishioners immediately established societies such as the Polish Falcons and the Holy Name Fathers in conjunction with the church. A survey of Polish-American ethnic parishes revealed the following:

The Polish immigrant regarded his national parish in America as both a religious and the community center . . . Thus, the church was a true unifying factor and helped maintain the cohesion of the primary group, perhaps more so in the U.S. than Poland.8

The first parishioners of Immaculate Heart of Mary focused on preserving their Polish heritage amid the early twentieth century’s rising American
nationalism. Using the church as a magnet for the Polish immigrants, they worked to create a socially cohesive community based on common religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Throughout the past century, these goals have carried over into the contemporary parish community in multiple ways. To begin, the ability to hold Mass and Confessions in the Polish language represented an original core method toward preservation of Immaculate Heart parishioners’ Polish ethnicity. The Polish immigrants firmly held on to the native language as a defining piece of their identities. At BINGO one night, several elderly women conversed about their rigorous Polish language training in Immaculate Heart of Mary School. The parochial school continues to integrate the Polish language into its current curriculum. This year, Immaculate Heart’s fifth and sixth grade students are studying Polish while in recent years they had been studying French. In addition, Immaculate Heart of Mary School’s annual Christmas concert encourages the entire community to reflect on their Polish ethnicity. The children sing numerous Polish Christmas carols to an open audience composed of the parish priest, teachers, parents, and many other supportive community members. Similarly, the students sing a Polish Song to Mary at weekly Mass.

The importance of the Polish language can be observed in many other facets of Immaculate Heart parishioners’ lives today. Each week on Sunday morning, Immaculate Heart of Mary parish celebrates Mass in the Polish language at nine o’clock. “Pan Z Wami”, Polish missalette and Prayer books, set prominently in the pews next to the English “Seasonal Missalettes”. Although the Sunday Polish Mass normally attracts lower attendance, its endurance over time reveals the parish community’s continued desire to cling to their ethnic heritage. In addition, Father Joe mentioned that many of the older parishioners still ask to hold their Confessions in the Polish language. The sacrament of Confession and particular prayers during Mass represent a Catholic’s most intimate communication with God. By choosing to discourse with God in Polish, Immaculate Heart of Mary’s parishioners display their lasting connections with their Polish ethnicity. Certainly, the parish continues to uphold certain goals set by its original founders.

Polish Hill’s Ecology

The placement of Polish Hill distinctly separates it from the surrounding Pittsburgh community. It has been and is a neighborhood cluttered with steep, narrow roads and stairways winding throughout the community. Clustered on the hillside, Polish Hill’s row homes overlook the drab business district of Lawrenceville. There are only two primary roads for entry into Polish Hill - one winding up from Lawrenceville and one coming down from Bigelow Boulevard, one of Pittsburgh’s main expressways on Bigelow Bou-
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levard. The geological isolation of Polish Hill from the greater Pittsburgh community allows for an environment predisposed to high community cohesion both yesterday and today. The quaint brick sidewalks and close housing of Polish Hill remind one of a once "close-knit neighborhood" in which "kids can feel free to go into other houses." Cheryl Barry, the Principal of Immaculate Heart of Mary School, alludes to this traditional American urban neighborhood still lingering. "That's how it always used to be and still is, at least in some parts."

Despite this parishioner's observations of neighborhood social life, Polish Hill today does not physically reflect what it once was. The steep concrete steps which link different roads on the Hill do not stand as sturdily or well-kept as they once were. Indeed, I have never seen anyone besides myself using these long stairways. As I walked down the main stairway leading to the bottom of Herron Road, I observed moss and lichens invading the concrete's cracks and heard unsure creaks coming from several steps. However, one Polish Hill researcher writing in 1953 noted "the steps are solid and the porches painted; the windows are clean and the curtains may be hand-crocheted." Many of the row homes which line the narrow streets of Polish Hill today stand in great need of repairs. Where many stores once surrounded Immaculate Heart of Mary Church on Brerton Road, now only two or three of these small family businesses remain.

From its beginning until today, Immaculate Heart of Mary parish has consisted of a primarily working class community. This additional socio-economic commonality further raises the potential for social cohesion within Immaculate Heart's parish community. In order to build the present-day Immaculate Heart of Mary church, early parishioners had to work closely in cooperation with each other to raise the $161,200.00 required in the early twentieth century. The lower class Polish community pooled their money and focused their energies on a source of common good - the church. Through the physical grandeur of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, they acknowledged themselves as a strongly religious community worthy of the American dream. Indeed, Immaculate Heart of Mary Church stands out amid this outwardly run-down neighborhood.

Inside, Immaculate Heart of Mary Church is no less awe-striking. When stepping into Immaculate Heart for the first time, I fell silent. It was an effect of what Greg Dening refers to as "the grandeur, separation, and the ambiance of holy things." Father Joe, Immaculate Heart's current pastor took me into the main church through a side door off the famous altar. The church's size struck me first, followed by the statues and pictures. Religious icons adorn every open space around the church's interior perimeter. Some, like the statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary have been in place since the church's construction in 1904. Others, like the bust of Blessed Francis Sidliczka, a recently deceased and now blessed nun, have been added within the past year. (Please refer to Figure 1 for a picture of the bust of the Blessed Francis
Sidliczka.) With my eyes slowly scanning the church interior, I, like many people before, felt enclosed in a "holy place."17

By every statue or picture, multi-colored candles burn brightly, standing vigil at a saint’s foot. Bright stained glass windows compliment the religious icons and candles as they depict various patron saints of Immaculate Heart’s Polish immigrants. Without a doubt, the most eye-catching part of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church is the altar. Electric light bulbs outline and illuminate the three figures of Mary and her parents standing behind the altar. On either side of the meticulously carved tabernacle, stands a grounded chandelier of electric lights. At Mass, the altar and its lights hold a distinct resemblance to a theater’s stage. (Please refer to Figure 2 for a photograph of Immaculate Heart’s Altar.) Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, in its unique opulence, discloses the hard work and sacrifice required from its parishioners to build it.

Sacrifices for the Hill

Immaculate Heart of Mary Church embodies sacrifice. Reminders of Christ’s self-sacrifice overwhelm the church’s physical being. A five foot tall crucifix stands prominently in the right hand corner from Immaculate Heart’s altar. Each day, the sacrificial ritual of Eucharist takes place upon this same altar. In the church tabernacle, Immaculate Heart of Mary houses the ultimate Christian symbol of sacrifice - the Host, Christ’s body ready to be consecrated at the altar. The Catholic faith itself which Immaculate Heart parishioners ground themselves in revolves around sacrifice.

In Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language, Greg Dening discusses this metaphor of sacrifice - how it continually affects humanity. He states, “The symbols make us, but we make the symbols too. In their presence, we create, as much as we respond to their meaning.”18 Thus, the aforementioned objects do not symbolize sacrifice in and of themselves. Rather, it is the people of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church who define these things as symbols of sacrifice. Parishioners imbue these objects with meaning and apply those meanings in all areas of church life. This metaphor of sacrifice permeates the ritual and social life of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. It is a basis upon which Immaculate Heart parishioners understand the creation and preservation of a community; of their community.

Throughout the history of Immaculate Heart of Mary’s parish community, this metaphor of sacrifice has presented itself and continues to present itself in a variety of forms. For the people of Polish Hill, Immaculate Heart of Mary symbolizes a testament to their personal sacrifices for the community. The early residents of Polish Hill petitioned the Bishop for permission of Immaculate Heart’s founding out of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church. St. Stanilaus Kostka was the first Polish ethnic parish in Pittsburgh. Once more Polish
immigrants settled in Pittsburgh, the need for another parish became evident. The Bishop granted permission for Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, and the first Masses were held in the attic of Immaculate Heart’s simple, red brick school. These founding parishioners chose voluntarily to worship in a humble environment; dreaming of their future gift to the community.

The immense church on Brerton Avenue could not have been built without the hard work and donations of Polish Hill’s early residents. In America’s capitalistic culture, people base their self-worth on income. Money donations symbolized a self-sacrifice for the lower working class immigrants. Despite the church building’s unfathomable price, the Polish community offered their time and finances to complete the project. People gave of themselves to the church, thereby sacrificing part of their financial well-being for the community. Sacrifice literally built the foundations of Immaculate Heart of Mary, and continues to reinforce it.

In the contemporary parish community, the original monetary sacrifice of Immaculate Heart’s founders can be observed in the parishioners’ restoration work of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. Recently, parishioners raised money to repair the church’s domed ceiling. Collection coin jugs could be found strategically placed throughout the church. Coupled with the Eucharistic sacrifice during Mass, the coin jugs acted as strong reminders to the parishioners of their personal Catholic duty of sacrifice. The following note appeared in Immaculate Heart’s weekly bulletin, thanking parishioners for giving of themselves for the sake of the church community.

The ceiling is repaired!
This past week the work was completed.
To all who have helped in any way by your donations and sacrifice, I pray the good Lord will bless you abundantly. I’m truly grateful that your sacrifice made this project possible and a reality.
Gratefully,
Father Joe

In this brief note, the parish recognizes these financial donations as acts of self-sacrifice made by Immaculate Heart parishioners. Father Joe encourages these sacrifices, thereby ensuring their continuance. More importantly, his note ensures the understanding of sacrifice as the community’s livelihood - the sustaining factor which makes the community work.

At Church BINGO nights, the facilitators and players continually emphasize this theme of financial self-sacrifice. All proceeds from BINGO benefit the Immaculate Heart of Mary parochial School. Generally every Friday night, Immaculate Heart’s basement, Rosary Hall is filled to capacity for BINGO. The vast majority of players are women, and a large portion of those women are first and second generation Polish immigrants. Most of the
players buy three or four BINGO cards at $2.00 a piece. While the price for cards is relatively low, the players view the game very seriously. Most women carry personal “Bingo Bags” and chips to each Bingo night. Before the games start, conversation and laughter of about forty players fill Rosary Hall. Once the numbers are called, however, scarcely a whisper is heard. In fact, I embarrassed myself once by asking a question right before the announcer started. Due to my inquisitiveness, the players around me missed the first few numbers called. I learned quickly that missing numbers does not make a happy BINGO player. Regardless of the parishioners’ serious attitude during the game, players do not consider lost money too wistfully. One player remarked to me, “It’s for the church” about her gambled losses. In that simple phrase, this elderly parishioner revealed the basic tenet of Immaculate Heart of Mary’s parish community. Anything given or done for the church symbolizes a sacrifice which preserves and replenishes the parish community’s social and religious bonds.

One ritual sacrifice continually has linked Immaculate Heart of Mary’s original parish community with its twentieth century parish community. Father Joe offers up Christ’s body and blood each day on Immaculate Heart’s altar just as Father Rydlewski offered it on the first day of the church’s conception. Since its beginning, Immaculate Heart of Mary parish has partaken of Christ’s self-sacrifice communally. This sacrifice binds them together every day as one unit. It represents not only how they understand their relationship to the Roman Catholic Church, but also how they understand their relationships to one another. Today, a majority of Immaculate Heart parishioners still partake of the Eucharist in the traditional manner. Thus, the priest places the Host in a person’s mouth as opposed to in his/her hands. This submissive act to the leader of Immaculate Heart’s parish community signifies people’s selflessness concerning the Church. The Eucharist allows Immaculate Heart’s entire Polish-American community to partake in sacrifice together. In light of this, the parish community initially embraced and continues to embrace the sacrament of Communion as a method toward preservation of their ethnic and social ties.

Besides the Eucharist, other more ritualistic aspects of sacrifice exist in Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. With Immaculate Heart’s focus on the Virgin Mary and many patron saints, offerings of prayers for intervention occur often. The Church contains three shrines to different personas of the Virgin Mary as well as two shrines for particular saints. (Please refer to Figure 3 for a photograph of Our Lady of Victory Shrine.) Scattered around the statues and pictures of each shrine are votive candles. Each lit candle stands as a cry for intercessory help. When in need of other worldly help, the parishioner places money in a shrine offering box and lights a candle. He/she asks the Virgin Mary or a particular saint to pray to God for either themselves or other persons. The prayer can span many subjects. Sometimes people ask for help concerning healing from illness or personal strength in spiritual

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trials. For the intercessor, the candle symbolizes a token of the parishioner’s self-sacrifice for this intercessory prayer. It is a financial and spiritual sacrifice, requiring personal prayer and personal funds.

The lighting of a votive candle, this ritual act of self-sacrifice, has been passed down through Immaculate Heart’s generations. It ensures the preservation and perseverance of a religious tradition which indicates their Polish ethnicity. Indeed, I have witnessed men and women parishioners of all ages giving money for an intercessory prayer before and after Masses. One Sunday, I observed a middle-aged mother teaching her dark-haired young daughter how to light the candles and where to deposit the money at the shrine for Our Lady of the Rosary. The young girl delighted in standing on her toes to perform the candle-lighting ritual. That same day, an elderly couple lit more than four candles at the same shrine.

Our Lady of the Rosary’s statue displays a crowned Mary gently holding her son as Saint Dominic and Saint Catherine of Sienna offer her wooden rosary beads. This shrine’s statue sets so that Mary’s peaceful gaze falls upon the faithful candle-lighter. The statue and candles provoke a sense of awe and protection. Similarly, Immaculate Heart’s shrine of Saint Anthony displays the monk standing with a child and book in his arms. His serene face softly bends down toward the votive candles as angels guard him on both sides. When a parishioner glances up after lighting a candle, he/she feels secure knowing that Mary or the saints are listening. As public displays of self-sacrifice which all church members can participate in, the votive offerings become a communal self-sacrifice. They represent spiritual and financial sacrifices which help to promote the cohesion of Immaculate Heart’s parish community.

Epilogue

Greg Dening argues that “in sacrifice,...human actions are transformed by being given meaning. What is destroyed - a man, a pig, a plantain branch, a piece of unleavened bread - becomes something else: a victim, an offering, a gift, a scapegoat.”24 For Immaculate Heart of Mary parish, the Eucharist, the time spent praying, and even the monetary gifts become something more. The parishioners add meaning to these simple items. They become symbols for the creation and continuance of a community - a community originally threatened by the socioeconomic crises in their Mother Country and now threatened by church authority in America. The Polish immigrants worked against many barriers of prejudice against Eastern Europeans from the Irish and German Diocesan hierarchy. To preserve their Polish cultural heritage amid movements for American assimilation, Immaculate Heart of Mary parish clung to the metaphor of sacrifice. As Dening states in Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language, “Sacrifice is the ultimate exercise of power.”25 This Polish-Ameri-
can community utilizes sacrifice to retain their power as a community within the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh and even within America itself.

Many factors stand as obstacles in Polish Hill’s struggle for survival. The roots of this isolated community, its people, are slowly trickling away from the Hill and into other Pittsburgh districts. In my observations, the greater majority of church attendees are elderly female parishioners. According to Cheryl Barry and several other parishioners, this reflects the demography of Immaculate Heart of Mary parish. The involved church members are primarily of the older generation; they tend to remain on the Hill while “most of the younger people move away.” Across America, “the less educated older generation is more active” in Polish-American communities. Increased opportunities for higher education and better employment entice many of the third generation to relocate outside of Polish Hill. As well, a definite decline in Immaculate Heart’s Polish-American population results from an increase in intermarriage.

Regardless of these perceived dangers, one older parishioner insists that “everyone here sticks together.” Immaculate Heart of Mary parishioners struggle to persist as a socially cohesive community grounded in the Catholic religion and Polish ethnicity. In order to survive, they cling to powerful symbols of their Polish ethnicity. Articles and posters concerning Pope John Paul II hang prominently on the bulletin board in the church’s vestibule (front entrance lobby). One article includes the following poem, in reference to a Slavonic pope:

In the middle of all their quarrels,
God will strike a giant bell
For a Slavonic pope, as He vacates the throne.
This one will not shrink from critics like the others:
Fearless as Christ, he will face all courageously.

As the first pope of Polish descent, John Paul II represents the rise in power of the Polish people.

Immaculate Heart of Mary’s parish community hold tight to symbols of sacrifice and power in their struggle for survival. Language is the power of communication. By preserving their use of the Polish language, the parishioners ensure the continuance of a defined link to their Polish heritage. In the same way, the “pope paraphernalia” in Immaculate Heart’s vestibule stands as an outward assertion of the community’s strength. Parishioners raised money together to repair the church’s ceiling and continually support Immaculate Heart of Mary School through BINGO games. These and other cooperative acts of Immaculate Heart’s parishioners preserve and reinforce the community’s social cohesion and internal power. Immaculate Heart of Mary Church - a community whose past and future identity rests upon how much it has given and can continue to offer of and for itself.
Figure 1

Bust of St. Francis Sidliczka
Photograph of Immaculate Heart of Mary’s Interior, off to the right of the main altar
Taken by: Natalie Moyer, October 1995
Figure 2

Immaculate Heart of Mary Church’s Altar
Photograph taken from choir loft (mezzanine floor of church)
Taken by: Natalie Moyer, October 1995
Figure 3: Our Lady of Victory Shrine
Photograph taken at front entrance into the main church Taken by: Natalie Moyer, October 1995
The following references include items referred to directly and indirectly for this research project:

- **Bulletins of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. Pittsburgh, PA. September - December 1995.**
- **Interview with Barry, Cheryl. Principal of Immaculate Heart of Mary School and Parish Council Member. Given by: Natalie Moyer at Immaculate Heart of Mary School. October 28, 1995.**
- **Interview with Swierzcynski, Rev. Joseph E., M. Div. Pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. Given by: Natalie Moyer at Immaculate Heart of Mary Rectory. October 28, 1995.**
- **Observational data from both regular and Polish Mass at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church**
- **Observational data from parish Bingo night and social interactions among parishioners before and after religious services**
  - A study of certain areas in the Sixth Ward of Pittsburgh and the processes of population mobility, ecological change, and ethnic succession
  - "The purpose of this study is to analyze a specific section of a large industrial city to show how these factors have affected the structure of the territorial parish." (p. 1)
  - Collection of Essays on Polish-Americans
  - Historical and sociological study of Italian, Black, and Polish ethnic groups in the city of Pittsburgh and its surrounding suburbs
  - Focus on demographics, parish settlement, class structure, discrimination
- **Dening, Greg. Mr. Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. c. 1992.**
  - Ethnographic history of the "Mutiny on the Bounty" led against Captain William Bligh in 1789.
  - Dening explores the human metaphor of sacrifice throughout his book, offering me a framework for my research findings of the sacrifice in Immaculate Heart of Mary Church
• “Diamond Jubilee Missalette”, Immaculate Heart of Mary Church: June 18, 1972. Saint Paul’s Cathedral, Box 157 “General Information Parishes”, folder “Immaculate Heart of Mary Polish Hill.”
  - Missalette containing the order of the Concelebrated Mass of Thanksgiv­ering for the seventy-fifth anniversary of Immaculate Heart
  - It lists all scripture readings and hymns for that Mass
  - All but one hymn is written in Polish, but they are not translated into English. Some prayers and intercessions are also written in Polish.
• Diocesan Historical Archives Record Sheet, “Immaculate Heart of Mary”, Pittsburgh Diocesan Archives. Saint Paul’s Cathedral, Box 157 “General Information Parishes”, folder “Immaculate Heart of Mary Polish Hill.”
  - Information sheet containing data on the founding of the church
  - Lists Immaculate Heart’s location, date of establishment and dedication, date of convent and school building, and newspaper articles available about the church
  - A history on the spread of Catholicism in the New World
  - He explores the hardships and successes experienced by the Catholic church in America from the initial Spanish missionary efforts to present day.
  - One chapter is titled Immigrant Catholics: A Social Profile. It contains several pages in reference to the Polish Catholic immigrant experience
• Fox, Paul. The Polish National Catholic Church Scranton, PA: School of Christian Living.
  - A history of the Polish National Catholic Church
  - An explanation of the Polish community’s split from the Roman Catholic Church
  - May provide useful information concerning the traditions of Polish Catholic culture
• “A Half Century of Service for God and Humanity”, a parish history. Pittsburgh Diocesan Archives. Saint Paul’s Cathedral, Box 157 “General Information Parishes”, folder “Immaculate Heart of Mary Polish Hill.”
  - Parish history from its beginnings in 1897 to its golden jubilee in 1947
  - The author (unmarked) uses vivid, pictorial language about Immaculate Heart’s founding
  - In this history, the founding goals of the parish are specified.
  - Sociological and ethnographic comprehensive study of Polish Americans across the United States.
  - Covers history of immigration, cultural characteristics, generational differences, etc.
Article written about the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Immaculate Heart of Mary's establishment
- Contains a brief history of the parish and its priests
- Lists social activities surrounding the anniversary celebration
  - History of Father Rydlewski's (the first pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary) founding of the first Holy Ghost seminary in Poland
  - The Polish Province of Holy Ghost Order set up an organization to care for the orphaned boys whose fathers died during wartime.
- Offers a glimpse into Immaculate Heart's connection to its "Motherland"
  - Brief article about writer's visit to Immaculate Heart of Mary church
    - She comments on the strong feelings of traditional Polish Catholic community which still survive
  - Reveals a possible community cohesion based on both common ethnicity and religion
    - A history on the Polish Catholic immigrant community in Chicago from 1850-1920
    - This book reinforces that the founding goals of the Polish Catholic community focused on using religion to preserve ethnicity
    - Historical/Biographical study of Polish Americans who have made an imprint on American history
    - Touches upon themes of assimilation and survival
    - An essay on religion in Western Pennsylvania, especially in respect to the industry of steel
    - She discusses the Eastern European Catholic immigrants' experience within ethnic churches and fraternal societies
  - Sanders, Irwin and Ewa T. Morawska. Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research, the Community Sociology Monograph Series Vol. II Boston, MA: Community Sociology Training Program, Department of Sociology, Boston University and the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, Inc. 1975.
- A survey of research completed concerning the Polish-American community
- Different sections covering ethnic parishes, Catholicism, and class

- Slowacki, Julius. "In the middle of all their quarrels...". 1848. Translated by: Bertha Witz. Taken from article "A Beacon's to God's Realm". anonymous.
- Poem written in the hopes that the Roman Catholic Church might appoint a Slavonic pope
- The Slavonic pope would contain strength, courage, and justice

- Discusses Polish immigration, Polish relations with other ethnicities, the Catholic Church in respect to Polonia

Notes

1 Interview with Barry, Cheryl. Principal of Immaculate Heart of Mary School. Interview concerning Immaculate Heart of Mary parish and school. 10/27/95. Given by: Natalie Moyer at Immaculate Heart of Mary School.
2 Interview with Barry, Cheryl. Principal of Immaculate Heart of Mary School. Interview concerning Immaculate Heart of Mary parish and school. 10/27/95. Given by: Natalie Moyer at Immaculate Heart of Mary School.
5 "A Half Century of Service for God and Humanity", a parish history. Pittsburgh Diocesan Archives. Saint Paul's Cathedral, Box 157 "General Information Parishes", folder "Immaculate Heart of Mary Polish Hill", p. 2
6 "A Half Century of Service for God and Humanity", a parish history. Pittsburgh Diocesan Archives. Saint Paul's Cathedral, Box 157 "General Information Parishes", folder "Immaculate Heart of Mary Polish Hill", p. 2
10 Interview with Barry, Cheryl. Principal of Immaculate Heart of Mary School. Interview concerning Immaculate Heart of Mary parish and school. October 27, 1995.
Interview with Barry, Cheryl. Principal of Immaculate Heart of Mary School. Interview concerning Immaculate Heart of Mary parish and school. Given by: Natalie Moyer at Immaculate Heart of Mary School. October 27, 1995.


Interview with Barry, Cheryl. Principal of Immaculate Heart of Mary School. Interview concerning Immaculate Heart of Mary parish and school. Given by: Natalie Moyer at Immaculate Heart of Mary School. October 27, 1995.

“Diocesan Archives - Parish Record Sheet”, Pittsburgh Diocesan Archives. Saint Paul’s Cathedral, Box 157 “General Information Parishes”, folder “Immaculate Heart of Mary Polish Hill”.


Interview with Cheryl Barry. Principal of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish. Interview concerning the parish community and school. Given by: Natalie Moyer at Immaculate Heart of Mary School. October 27, 1995.


“Diocesan Archives - Parish Record Sheet”, Pittsburgh Diocesan Archives. Saint Paul’s Cathedral, Box 157 “General Information Parishes”, folder “Immaculate Heart of Mary Polish Hill”.

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