

Virginia

Duluth DOLOTA

QUESTIONNAIRE ON PARISH HISTORY

For compiling centennial volume on the Diocese of Saint Paul

This questionnaire is sent by the Chancery Office of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul with the approval of the Bishops of Minnesota to aid in the collection of historical data necessary for the preparation of a "History of the Catholic Church in Minnesota" to be issued on the centennial of the establishment of the Diocese of Saint Paul, July 19, 1950. The questions also furnish an outline according to which the material may be elaborated into a narrative of parish history.

Please indicate the sources of information and the location of records. If in some cases answers require more than the given space, add an extra page. Send replies to the Chancery Office, 244 Dayton Avenue, St. Paul, Minn., before March 1, 1949.

1) Official name of parish; name of city, town, county. Was the name ever otherwise? No

St. John the Baptist Polish Catholic Church
Virginia, Minnesota

2) Present parish boundaries? If a mission parish is attached give its name and boundaries.
All the Polish Catholic families of the city of Virginia.

The Mission attached to St. John's Parish is St. Joseph's Catholic Mission
church, Buyck, Minnesota.

3) Was the parish ever part of some other parish, and if so of what one? Yes. On
Jan. 11, 1905 separated from Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Virginia, Minn.

4) Was the parish ever divided; if so what parish or parishes were formed from it? No

5) When and under whose direction was the present church building erected? If ever enlarged, decorated, or notably altered, when and under whose direction?
Rev. Vincent S. Majer, in 1921. Decorated in 1936, new electric organ
installed, new colored windows set in, and the whole church debt paid
under the direction of Rev. C. A. Cieglewicz.

6) If the present church is not the original one, how many preceding ones were there, when and by whom built, and where located? The first frame church was moved in,
in the year 1905 by Rev. Michael Sengir. Located where the new church is
built at 319 Third Street South, Virginia, Minn.

7) When, where and by whom was the holy sacrifice of the Mass first offered within the present parish limits? In what other places was the Mass offered before the erection of the first church? April 12, 1905, on Easter. The first Mass was offered
by the Late Father Michael Sengir.

8) What is the first baptism recorded? The first confirmation? The first marriage? The first burial? Francis Benedict Lopatka, born March 20, 1905; baptized March 26,
1905, son of Lawrence Lopatka. First marriage, Sept. 2, 1905, Martin Udick
and Mary Malaszek. Witnesses: Joseph Olszewski and Felixa Kaszel,
Pastor: Rev. Michael Sengir. Victor Emil Ramponi, infant, died June 25th,
1905, buried June 26, 1905

9) What official records are kept at the church, rectory, school, etc. How far back do they extend? Minutes book - Corporation. Baptismal, matrimonial, burial and Status Ammorim books extend to January 5, 1905.

10) What is known regarding the first settlement of the locality and the arrival of the first Catholics? Where did they come from? Parishioners of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church came from Poland.

11) What missionary priests exercised the sacred ministry in the locality before the coming of the first resident pastor? Where did they come from and how frequently? Father Michael Sengir was the first pastor.

12) Name the resident priests (pastors and assistants) to the present time with dates of the beginning and end of their service.

Rev. Fr. Michael Sengir	Jan. 4, 1905 to Dec. 23, 1918
Rev. Fr. Stanislaus Meger	Dec. 24, 1918 to Aug. 18, 1919
Rev. Fr. Stanislaus Iciek	Aug. 20, 1919 to April 3, 1920
Rev. Fr. Stanislaus Meger	April 5, 1920 to Nov. 14, 1921
Rev. Fr. Vincent S. Majer	Nov. 20, 1921 to July 20, 1923
Rev. Fr. Adam Werbila	July 23, 1923 to Oct. 26, 1923
Rev. Fr. Casimir Anthony Cieslewicz	Nov. 1, 1923 to

13) Name the priests, if any, who died while in the service of the parish, with date of death and place of burial. All died elsewhere. So far no one died in St. John's Church.

14) Name as many as possible of the pioneer parishioners, especially those who rendered extraordinary service in the parish interests. Stanley Andrzejczyk, Adam Boho, Emilia Block, Anthony Bradish, Joseph Cebelinski, Tom Cech, C. A. Graham, Charles Grigal, Alex Gaseski, F. S. Kishel, Albert Czajka, Joseph Kuberka, Vitold Lutkevich, August Masonick, Joseph Napierala, Jacob Patalas, Andrew Roczniak, Barney Schley, Andrew Dziubala, John Roszak, Stanley Wujcik, Charles and Joe Znameroski, Julian Werschler, Tom Lezalla.

15) Indicate the racial or national composition of the parish population, the sources of immigration, the population at successive stages. Most of them immigrated from

16) What methods of religious instruction were employed before the establishment of the parochial school? Date of establishment of school, convent, etc.? What religious communities are or were in charge? Names of superiors, principals, teachers? Number of pupils from time to time? No school with St. John's Church.

17) When was the parish cemetery established? Was it ever enlarged or its locality changed? Virginia Improvement Co. took charge of first burials. Joseph Brisson, who died Sept. 29, 1893 was buried in the cemetery the Virginia Municipal Hospital now stands. Calvary cemetery was organized March, 1895, maintained by the City.

18) What data regarding rectory and other parish property? Rectory was built in 1906, which nicely serves this purpose.

20) What data regarding parishioners who have been distinguished by vocation to the priesthood or the religious life, and among the laity as leaders in professional or commercial life or in political or social service? Rev. Stephen Wagon, OSB, ordained to priesthood June 6, 1948. Does mission work in the Bahama Islands. Gerald LaPatka is studying for the priesthood. Sister Lucille Andrzejczyk.

Among laity as leaders: Mr. Stanley Wujcik, Mr. August Masonick, Mrs. Anna Andrzejczyk, Mrs. Frank Fortun, Miss Elizabeth Boho, Mrs. Wanda Miero, Mr. Joseph Gussman, Hon. Andrew Benkusk.

21) What societies or organizations in the parish at present and in the past, devotional, charitable, educational, social, etc.? Are their minute-books preserved, or other records of their activities? Holy Name Society, St. John's Society, Holy Rosary, Sacred Heart, Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The minute books are well preserved.

22) Has a sketch of the history of the parish ever been published in any book or pamphlet or prepared in manuscript? If so please send a copy to the Chancery Office of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul, 244 Dayton Avenue, Saint Paul, together with this questionnaire containing all possible answers. Yes, on many occasions. Will try to look up and enclose such.

23) Are there any parish publications and files of the same preserved, such as parish monthlies or annuals, programs, announcements, etc.? Are there any scrap books of newspaper clippings or other historical materials? Any photographs of persons or places? Any letters, diaries or similar material of historical value? Not of much value.

24) Is any such material available for use in compiling the centennial volume? Is it held in safe-keeping and accessible to the compiler of the centennial volume? Yes.

Please indicate the location of the material and the address of the custodian.
323 South Third Street, Virginia, Minnesota

25) What events of importance are noteworthy in the life of the parish, such as the number of parish missions or retreats, the number of conversions, charity work, public lectures, study-club work, the support of the Catholic press and Catholic literature, efforts for civic improvement, etc.? Regularly. Triduum is held every year in both languages. Missions every three years. Novenas, four a year. Study Club, twice a month.

26) What extraordinary events peculiar to the locality are noteworthy from pioneer days to the present? Historical Fair in Virginia City in 1893 and 1902 was biggest yet. New beautiful church was built - Mortgage on church was turned Jan 17 - 1940 - 5 golden Weddings. Father Damm - Jas. Kibel - Paul Bator - all these groups and Tom Craig (C24)

27) If Catholic missionary activities were conducted in behalf of Indian tribes or groups, please present the record on a separate sheet. None in this collection

28) Date of reply to this questionnaire? January 28, 1949

Signature and office of signer

Ed. Basilin A. Presbury

St. John the Baptist R.C. Church was 45 years old, April 21, 1950

but the story of Polish participation in the building of this City dates back to the early days in the middle eighties. When Virginia's march to Northern Minnesota supremacy was first begun, the Polish citizens of the town who desired to worship in the manner of their Fathers, made heroic sacrifices to build a House of God in which they would hear the words spoken which were nearest their hearts, with the old customs and in the Mother Tongue.

A small group of men, headed by John Neehan, Anton Szymoniak and Frank Trampush, bought four lots on third street south, on December 21, 1904. On January 9, 1905, the property was incorporated as St. John the Baptist R. C. Church, by the late Rev. James McElrick, Bishop and Monsignor Joseph Bush, Vicar General. Anton Szymoniak was Secretary and Frank Trampush, Treasurer, according to the State Laws of Minnesota and St. Louis County.

The Polish people of Virginia embraced their new Sanctuary with such zeal and sacrifice, that Bishop McElrick surprised them by appointing as their first regular Pastor, the Rev. Father Michel Sengir of Sturgeon Lake, Minnesota. This venerable servant of his Master did yeoman services in guiding the new Church onward to its future growth and success. He continued work until December 8, 1918, when he was called by Bishop McElrick to take over the Pastorate of the Church, St. Mary Star of the Sea, in Duluth, where he worked until his death, May 19, 1935.

Father Sengir, during these first years of storms and struggles, guided the Church, spiritually and financially, towards the great triumph later on. His first official act as Pastor, was to bless the little wooden frame church. This was done on the Fourth of July, 1905.

It was an auspicious beginning for the work which, through stress and toil, was to make St. John's Church one of the finest churches of Virginia.

The same year, in October, Father Sengir bought a dwelling which he remodeled into a real home and had it moved to the present site of the rectory.

In 1909 new iron ore mines were steadily opening, the Virginia & Rainy Lake Co. was just starting to grow, there was plenty of work and people were coming by the hundreds to Virginia from Europe, Canada, and the Eastern States. This big rush added many new parishioners to St. John's and the little church could not accommodate all for worship. In the middle of that year the church was enlarged. The cost of the improvements was about \$7,500 and included three altars and new pews. The remodeled and beautifully decorated church was dedicated on August 20, 1910, by the Rt. Rev. Paul Kahle, B.D. (Jan. 1911)

During Father Sengir's administration, three missions were held at the Church by the Jesuit Fathers of New York and Franciscan Fathers of Pulaski, Wisconsin. After working with the Virginia people for 13 years, Father Sengir was called to Duluth and the Rev. Father Stanislaus Meger succeeded him as Pastor of the Church, but, after six months, he asked the Bishop to be transferred to his people at Sturgeon Lake. He was succeeded by the famous American Army Chaplain, Rev. Fr. S. A. Leiek, who is known by many Virginians to the present day as a great orator. He left the Virginia Parish on the 19th of August, 1919, for Norwich, Connecticut. Rev. Father S. T. Meger was called back temporarily and after six months, was succeeded by Rev. Father Majer, on February 22, 1920.

Father Majer gave himself to work for a much-needed church and the people of the congregation soon had the ways and means well under way. The meeting which started the work for the new church was held during the last part of June, 1920. A building committee, consisting of Paul Vissacko, Joseph Kiegler, Andrew Druibala, Albert Binkowski and Zygmunt Kishel was chosen, and every parishioner pledged \$50.00 towards the building fund. The plans for the new church were drawn by Mr. E. H. Berg of Eveleth and work on the building was pushed rapidly and it was finished in the fall of 1921. The finished building has a length of 120 feet

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and a width of 46 feet. The church proper is 30 feet. The steeple, 36 feet, is the highest point in Virginia. The Church accommodates 500 people.

Father Major was succeeded by the Rev. Father Adam Verbill, on July 5, 1923. He was with them only one year but in that time he did much for the people and endeared himself to them. One of the beautiful pictured windows of the new Church is in his remembrance. He left for a Colorado hospital on account of his health. He died September 21, 1925, and was buried at East Chicago, Indiana.

On March 7, 1926, the Rt. Rev. John T. McNicholas, D.D., appointed the Rev. C. A. Cieslewicz Pastor of the Church.

Rev. Fr. Cieslewicz was born in Chicago, September 16, 1897. He attended grade school at Kesholt, Wisconsin. Graduated from St. Bonaventure's College in 1917, and from the Polish Seminary at Detroit, in 1923. He was ordained, July 1, 1923 by Bishop McNicholas in the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Duluth. Before coming to Virginia, he was Pastor for one year at St. Casimir's Church, Cloquet, Minnesota.

When Father Cieslewicz came to Virginia he made arrangements for the dedication of the new church. The ceremony took place on Sunday, July 20, 1924. The Rt. Rev. John T. McNicholas, D.D. of Duluth, blessed the cornerstones and dedicated the Church in the presence of prominent members of the Catholic Clergy from all sections of Northern Minnesota. After the ceremonies, the Pastor of the Church, Rev. C. A. Cieslewicz, celebrated High Mass and Bishop McNicholas delivered the sermon.

In the cornerstones was placed a Bible, the July 12th issue of the Catholic Bulletin and an issue of the Virginia Daily Enterprise, a statistical history of the Parish written by a member of the Church and U. S. coins; a penny, nickel, dime, quarter and fifty cent piece.

The present church building cost approximately \$65,000. This does not include the windows, which were donated by parishioners at a cost of about \$3,000. In 1932, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Gmajka donated the Church bell. Later on, Mr. Gmajka donated the Stations of the Cross and two candelabras in memory of his wife. He also donated \$400.00 in cash. The electric fixtures were donated by Mr. B. V. Schley. Mrs. Julian Werchler donated three costly church vestments. The Church was redecorated in 1936 at a cost of \$2150.00.

During Father Giesiewicz's administration the Church mortgage was paid, the Church was repaired and redecorated and a pipe organ costing \$2000.00 was purchased.

The Church Organizations which are active in promoting the growth and welfare of the Church are; Society of St. John the Baptist, Group 297 I.N.F. membership 127; The Holy Name Society, 42 members; Rosary Society, 96 members; B.V.M. Sodality, 24 members; Ladies Aid Sewing Circles, 50 circles; Society of the Sacred Heart, 56 members; St. Cecilia's Choir, 16 members.

The Charter Members of St. John the Baptist R.C. Church who are still living are Tom Lesalla, John Lisowski, Victor Karpinski, Zygmunt Kischelowski, Konstanty Keprowicz, Joseph Lorbieski, Albert Gmajka, Tom Smigielski, Joe Predzinski, Peter Gassman, Stanley Andrzejczyk, John Madaja and Peter Karpinski.

The present officers of the Church are; F. S. Kischal, Secretary and Joseph Schley, Treasurer.