

How the Ministry of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate influenced my life.

For over 60 years priests from the Assumption Province of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate have presided over baptisms, marriages, and funerals for four generations of my family. Over these years they were my pastors, mentors, retreat directors, spiritual advisors, family friends-- and bridge partners.

When I arrived in Canada in 1949 as a young teenager, my family spent the first three years in a northern Ontario gold mining town. The small Catholic church had a Francophone pastor. The pre-Vatican II liturgy was familiar and provided much comfort to new immigrants. But we did miss the Polish devotions- Gorzkie Zale, Godzinki,- May Devotions..... When we moved "down south"we found all that in the St. Peter & Paul Church in Welland. Father Puchniak officiated at my marriage to Henry in 1955.

As time went on, we became members of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in St. Catharines where our three children were baptized, then St. Stanislaus in Toronto, and finally-- to this day - St. Maximilian Kolbe in Mississauga.

The Second Vatican Council brought welcome changes to the Sunday Liturgy. We became lectors and learned to fully participate in Sunday Mass. It was especially important to the children who spoke Polish fluently, loved the Polish hymns and sang along with enthusiasm. When my husband's job brought us to Mississauga we therefore opted to drive to St. Stan's rather than join the local parish which was connected to the school the children attended.

Both my husband and I became very actively involved in the establishment of St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish community. For me this became an entirely new chapter in my spiritual life. Thanks to our first pastor, the late Fr. Stan Bak, I started to read Scriptures daily, attended liturgical seminars and became increasingly aware of the importance of the role of laity in the Church. We became involved in the Renew Program, conducted Baptism Preparation meetings and were a Team Couple in the Polish language Marriage Encounter at Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre. All this had a profound impact in my spiritual life, as well as on our marriage and on the upbringing of our children, and even grandchildren. It was with great joy we witnessed the baptism of our first great - grandchild in our parish not long ago.

As I look back, I thank God for the influence the Oblate Fathers have had on my- and our family's - life these past 60 years. Not only did we receive the necessary guidance and support from the Oblates,- but also the opportunity to be able to worship in Polish. The prayers and traditions I was taught as a child continue to be important to us. As I frequently say: "I still speak to God in the language of my childhood". My deepfelt thanks to all the Father Oblates who were, and still continue to be , a part of my life. Bóg zapłać! -

Anna Lopinski