

SAINT CASIMIR

Founded: 1898 | First Mass: March 4, 1899 | Present church built: 1924-1925

Patron Profile:

Saint Casimir

(1458-1484)

Feast Day: March 4

The third of King Casimir IV and Elizabeth of Austria's thirteen children, Casimir is remembered for his austere piety, charity to the poor, and deep compassion for others. Although a prince, he rejected many of the trappings of the royal court. Casimir was greatly influenced, both spiritually and politically, by the priest and historian John Dlugosz, with whom he studied in his youth.

When Casimir was in his early-to-mid teens, a group of Hungarian nobles asked his father to send Casimir to Hungary to serve as their king. Casimir set out with an army, but as they traveled, he and his officers realized their forces were outnumbered and opted to return to Poland rather than pursue the throne. His actions angered the King, who briefly confined his son. Following his release, Casimir returned to a life of study and prayer. He also decided not to marry, despite pressure from his father and other members of the nobility.

From 1481 to 1483, Casimir reigned as King of Poland while his father was out of the country. Later, he developed tuberculosis and died while traveling to Lithuania in 1484. He is buried in the Vilnius Cathedral in Lithuania; his tomb is located in a chapel built in his honor in the 1630s. Casimir is venerated as a patron saint of Poland, Lithuania, and young people.



PARISH HISTORY

Polish immigrants started settling in the southwest part of South Bend in the 1870s, due to its proximity to the city's major industrial employers. By 1893, the community had grown large enough that Father Valentine Czyzewski, C.S.C., pastor of Saint Hedwig and a leader in South Bend's Polish community, began encouraging residents living south of the Grand Trunk Railroad line to create a new parish. Five years later, they established Saint Casimir. Construction on a two-story building to house both its church and school commenced in April 1898 and the new parish celebrated its first Mass on March 4, 1899. Father Anthony Zubowicz, C.S.C., served as the parish's first pastor. This structure still stands today to the south of the present church.

Father Stanislaus Gorka, C.S.C., became pastor in September 1915 and during his tenure, the parish built its present church at the corner of Dunham and Webster. Bishop John F. Noll of Fort Wayne blessed the new edifice on November 15, 1925. The Most Reverend Roman Atkielski, Auxiliary Bishop of Milwaukee, consecrated the church on May 4, 1949.

Since the 1960s, the neighborhood around Saint Casimir has become more ethnically diverse, which is reflected in the growing number of Latino parishioners. In 1994, Saint Casimir consolidated with Saint Stephen. Nearly a decade later, in 2003, Saint Stephen closed and Saint Casimir then merged with Saint Adalbert. From Saint Casimir's founding, members of the Congregation of Holy Cross have served the parish, and since 2010, Father Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C., has been its pastor.



Architectural Glossary

- **Clerestory:** The upper part of a church, containing a series of windows. It is clear of the roofs of the aisles and admits light to the central parts of the building.
- **Cruciform:** denoting a church with a cross-shaped plan with a nave and transepts

Photography: Bartholomew J. Timm
Text & Layout: Andrew J. Remick

Sources: "St. Casimir of Poland" Catholic News Agency, catholicnewsagency.com; "St. Casimir," Saint of the Day, americancatholic.org; St. Casimir Parish, *St. Casimir Church Art and Symbolism*, 2004; Glory-June Grieff, "Saint Casimir Parish Historic District National Register Nomination Form," 1996; "St. Casimir Parish, South Bend," en.wikipedia.org, accessed March 28, 2015; Denis R. McNamara, *Heavenly City: The Architectural Tradition of Catholic Chicago*, Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2005.

ART & ARCHITECTURE

Built in 1924 -1925, the present church was designed by the noted Chicago architecture firm, Worthmann and Steinbach. Their portfolio includes a number of landmark churches in the Windy City, including Saint Hyacinth, Saint John Berchmans, and Saint Mary of the Angels, all of which contribute to the exuberant tradition among Polish congregations of monumental churches. Worthmann and Steinbach's designs often draw on the architecture of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Poland. These centuries are considered a "golden age" in Polish history due to it being an era of peace and prosperity before Poland fell under the political domination of its Russian, Austrian, and Prussian neighbors. This period witnessed a flourishing of the arts and many villages and towns built beautiful churches with tall towers, grand exterior ornamentation, and lavish interior decoration. Poles brought these artistic traditions with them to the United States and by incorporating them into their churches, they were not only expressing their devotion to God, but also their ethnic and national pride.

The plan of the church reflects the tradition of Roman basilicas, with its nave terminating in a domed apse containing the high altar. However, the shallow transepts extending from the nave to the east and west are more strongly associated with cruciform churches. Between the loft and transepts, the nave is flanked by columns and rounded arches, which are indicative of the Romanesque style of architecture.

The artistic focal point of the interior is the mural within the apse. It centers on an image of Christ the King enthroned in heaven. He is flanked by portraits of Saint Casimir on the left and Saint Stanislaus Kostka on the right, both of whom are patrons of Poland and youth. Medallions containing the symbols of the Four Evangelists are alongside the three central figures. Divine Providence is depicted above Christ and the Holy Spirit is signified by a dove below. The Twelve Apostles are represented along the bottom of the mural.

Stained glass windows adorn the church throughout the nave, transepts, and clerestory. The windows were made by the Columbia Plate Glass Window Company of Milwaukee and they depict a variety of Saints, Blessed, Bible stories, and traditional Catholic devotions. In the center of the Rose Window above the choir loft is a representation of Divine Providence.

RECENT PARISH MILESTONES

- 1996: Saint Casimir Parish Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places
- 2005: Felician Sisters move into Saint Casimir's former rectory
- 2006-2007: Parishioners renovate interior of the church