

The Ministry of Father Vincent Barzynski, C.R. and the Sisters of the Resurrection to the Polish Immigrants in Chicago in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The Resurrectionist priests and brothers were founded in Paris by Bogdan Janski, Peter Semeneko and Jerome Kasziewicz, a group of Polish exiles in the mid 1800s. Some of the first Polish priests to minister to the thousands of Polish immigrants who were pouring into Chicago just as the city was rising from the great Chicago fire of 1871 were themselves founded by Polish exiles.

I would like to focus briefly on the work of Father Vincent Barzynski, C.R. a Polish missionary who arrived in Chicago after a few years of working in Texas. Father Barzynski was called “one of the greatest organizers of Polish immigrants in Chicago and in America”. He was the founder of St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish and its first pastor, serving for 25 years from 1874 until his death in 1899. St. Stanislaus Kostka is considered the Mother Church of all Polish Churches and it was the largest Polish parish in the country at the time.

The charism of the Resurrectionist Priests and Brothers is the transformation of society. Father Vincent Barzynski lived this charism in the many ways he reached out to the Polish immigrants, not only as an educator of all ages, but in responding to their many needs in this new land.

Father Barzynski was so much more than just the pastor. There was no facet of religious endeavor or social program that did not emanate from his broad vision and genius for organization. He felt the responsibility of caring for immigrants in every phase of pastoral activity. For example:

- He thought that the most effective instrument of uniting the immigrants was the establishment of a fraternal aid society, even starting this in San Antonio Texas to provide burial insurance and survivor assistance. This was the first such organization founded by Poles in America. He:
 - Co-founded the Polish Roman Catholic Union
 - Held the first convention in Chicago for all the Polish Catholic parishes and colonies throughout the USA. He saw the need of a central organization which would unite the Poles in the USA and keep them close to the Catholic faith, stating: “The aim of our organization is to uphold the Catholic faith and our national heritage through the promotion of Catholic learning and instruction and hoped to invite various Polish Sisterhoods.”
 - Wrote: “The missions in the US are indeed promising, but they lack organization – a heart and a head are needed”
 - Established a central society for Poles, with leaders in each Polish settlement to act as regional secretaries in Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Indiana.
- He opened a parish bank – allowing immigrants to build homes and improve their conditions of living without paying a high percent of interest

- He started a Polish Publishing Company, educating immigrants of all ages
 - His brother founded the first Polish Catholic weekly newspaper called Pielgrzym, the only Polish Catholic newspaper in the USA at the time
 - He explained the purpose of the Publishing Company as: “We are working for the Poles, but every Pole born on American soil will never be a European Pole. Our aim, then, is this: that each Pole retain his Catholic faith, learn the language and history of Poland, but be given the chance to become a good Yankee”
 - Some examples of publications were:
 - Wiara I Ojczyzna (Faith and Fatherland) and many other books
 - A weekly newspaper
 - A daily newspaper, the Dziennik Chicagowski, for the defense and advancement of Poles in America, the Catholic Church, the United States and Poland
 - Nadzieja (Hope) – first magazine for Polish Catholic youth in the USA
 - Many other magazines

- He brought many religious Congregations of Polish Sisters to help with missionary work: the Felicians, the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, the Sisters of the Resurrection and he helped found the Franciscan Sisters of Blessed Kunegunda (Now the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago).
- He started an orphanage with the School Sisters of Notre Dame
- He helped with the foundation of St. Mary of Nazareth Hospital with the Holy Family of Nazareth Sisters
- He started St. Stanislaus Kostka College staffed by the Resurrectionists which became Weber High School and was the forerunner of Gordon Tech High School

There were many Polish Sisters staffing the large number of Polish parishes that were founded to reach out to the needs of Polish immigrants in Chicago. I would like to focus on my Congregation, the Sisters of the Resurrection.

The Sisters of the Resurrection were founded by a mother and daughter, Blessed Celine Borzecka and Mother Hedwig Borzecka. We are the only Congregation in the history of the Church founded by a mother and daughter. Although we are autonomous from the Resurrectionist Priests and Brothers, we share their charism and are a feminine branch whose mission is to transform society, especially through the uplifting of women in society.

We were invited by Father Barzynski and Father Francis Gordon, C.R., the first pastor of St. Mary of the Angels Parish, to staff this parish school in Bucktown. Sister Anne Strzelecka and three other Sisters arrived in Chicago on February 2, 1900 and the very next day 425 students arrived eager to start their classes. The Sisters found this to be quite challenging. Sister Anne wrote about the difficulties to trying to teach 8th grade boys in a culture that was so foreign to the Sisters.

In 1905, the Sisters built their first convent and novitiate building on Hermitage Avenue across from St. Mary of the Angels Church. Shortly after that, they wanted to start a high school for girls on this property; however, Bishop Quigley advised them to go to the outskirts of Chicago to Norwood Park or Lemont. He said that young people need fresh air and greenery instead of the hustle and bustle of inner city Chicago. In 1912 then, the Sisters purchased property on Talcott Avenue in Norwood Park, which now houses many buildings for the varied ministries of the Sisters of the Resurrection.

Just as Father Vincent Barzynski reached out to help Polish immigrants in so many different ways, the Sisters of the Resurrection have continued to always try to respond to the needs of the people at the times and places of their ministries in both Bucktown and Norwood Park. Some of the ways in which they did this were:

- Opening up an elementary and high school as boarding schools as well as day schools on the Talcott Avenue property.
- Using the 1905 building in Bucktown to start a Day Care which was incorporated in 1917 at a time when most people never even thought of incorporating such a ministry.
- Using the 1905 building in Bucktown as a home for single, working women, most of whom were Polish.
- Staffing various parish elementary schools and St. Casimir High School (now Our Lady of Tepeyac) for girls in Chicago, its suburbs and other places throughout the country.
- Opening Resurrection Medical Center in 1953 to respond to the pleas of people to have a hospital on the far northwest side of Chicago.
- Expanding Resurrection College Prep High School with a new building in 1962 as more and more students were seeking enrollment.
- Opening Resurrection Retirement community with apartments for over 500 senior citizens in 1978 – again at the request of elderly people who could no longer care for their own homes and property.
- Staffing Resurrection Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Park Ridge beginning in 1980 as the first of several nursing homes in the area.
- Acquiring several other hospitals, nursing homes, retirement centers, ambulatory care centers and office buildings for physicians to become part of the largest Catholic Health Care System in the State of Illinois, which we now co-sponsor with four other religious Congregations of Sisters.
- Opening Child Care Centers associated with some of the hospitals in other locations.
- Building Resurrection Life Center on the Talcott Avenue property as a nursing home for Priests, Brothers and Sisters of various Congregations.

The legacies of Father Vincent Barzynski, the Resurrectionist priests and brothers as well as the Sisters of the Resurrection are similar to many other Congregations of Polish descent, as well as Priests, Brothers and Sisters who have served Polish immigrants in Chicago for many years.

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Sisters of the Resurrection

