

POLISH HYMNS AT HOLY FAMILY. BY J by Jim Leary

Years ago, on Sundays and holidays, the churches of Ashland and its environs resounded with hymns sung in the language of immigrant peoples: Bohemians, Finns, Norwegians, Poles, Swedes. Nowadays, such singing is comparatively rare; the old timers are nearly gone and, with them, the old songs.

It was, consequently, a special experience to hear Polish hymns emanate from the loft of Holy Family Church as the dawn broke Christmas morning. Nothing like that had happened for more than two decades.

The singers were members of a Polish conversation class. Begun in August 1979, with the support of Father Isadore Langheim, the class meets Wednesdays at the home of Mary Ziolkowski.

Gathered in Mary's living room, the members--most of whom grew up speaking Polish in Ashland's east side--share Polish books and papers, food, and conversation. And no session is complete without song.

Holy Family Church's ~~own~~ old Polish hymnbook carried songs aplenty to ~~xxxx~~ correspond with the liturgical calendar: hymns for May, for Easter, and, of course, Christmas. All of the hymns performed on Christmas 1980 once played a prominent part in the ~~local~~ local church's holiday service: W Zlobie Lezy (In a Manger), Cicha Noc (Silent Night), Lulujze, Jezuniu (Lullaby, Sweet Jesus), Przybielzeli do Betlejem (Quickly on to Bethlehem), Wsrod Nocney Ciszy (In the Still of the Night), and Gdy Sie Chrystus Rodzi (Christ is Born).

Singing these venerable numbers, with considerable power and feeling, were Bernice Barnak, Helen ~~Bun~~ Buniowski, Julia Gaik, Martha Jonovic, Rose Lajcak, Kay McGaffey, Mary Stelmach, Pete Suminski, and Mary Ziolkowski. Marjorie Guthrie assisted on the organ. The group, joined by others from the class who were absent over the Christmas holidays, hopes to continue their public performances, both in the Church and, possibly, in area rest homes.

Through their efforts a rich cultural tradition may not only be preserved, but sustained on into the future.