Apostolic Succession
In The
Polish National Catholic Church

In the Old Testament, when God established His Covenant with the nation of Israel, He provided for a living, continuing authority in the Mosaic priesthood (cf. 2 Chronicles 19:11; Malachi 2:7). This authority did not end when the Old Testament Scripture was written, rather it continued as the safeguard and authentic interpreter of the Sacred Scripture.

When our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ established His Church, He fulfilled this living, continuing authority to teach (Matthew 28:19-20), govern (John 21:17) and sanctify (Luke 19; Matthew 28:19; John 20:23), in His name. This living authority is called "apostolic" because it has its origin in the twelve apostles and continues with their successors. It is this apostolic authority that preserves and authentically interprets the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is this same apostolic authority that determined the canon of the Bible, and will continue to preserve the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The apostles and, therefore, their legitimate successors are the persons to whom Christ entrusted the duty of forming in His name, among all nations and for all ages, the Holy Catholic Church. The Polish National Catholic Church was organized within this historic continuity, descended from the Holy Catholic Church that our Lord Jesus Christ established after His Resurrection in Jerusalem.

The Polish National Catholic Church mirrors the same organizational principles that Christ gave to the apostles. It possesses and safeguards the same faith that He deposited with them; it believes in the doctrine, governance and worship of the primitive Apostolic Church.

Bishop Francis Hodur

Historically speaking, the beginning of the Polish National Catholic Church in the United States of America took place in 1897 in Scranton, Pennsylvania. At that time a group of Polish Americans, consisting of about 300 families, called Rev. Francis Hodur for guidance and leadership. Together they organized the first Polish National Catholic Parish of St. Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr in Scranton. Rev. Francis Hodur was then a priest of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania and pastor of Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Parish in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania.

The Polish National Catholic Church was organized within the context of the emerging movement of nationalism. Established on the basis of democratic catholicity, the Polish National Catholic Church spread to several sections of the United States of America and Canada.

The First Synod of the Polish National Catholic Church was held in September 1904 in Scranton. This first synod represented some 20,000 adherents and interested individuals and organizations from five states. It was during this gathering that Rev. Francis Hodur was elected as the first bishop by the representatives of the Synod. Bishop Francis Hodur was consecrated in 1907 in Utrecht, Holland. Consecrating him were Archbishop Gerard Gul of Utrecht, Bishop John Van Thiel of Haarlem, and Bishop Peter Spit of Deventer. The consecration of the Most Rev. Francis Hodur gave

the Polish National Catholic Church a share in the Western line of Apostolic Succession. The doctrine of Apostolic Succession means that, according to the institution of Christ, the bishops succeed one another in an unbroken chain from Christ Himself through the apostles and their lawful successors to the present time. This doctrine of Apostolic Succession continues to be upheld by the Polish National Catholic Church.

The Apostolic Line

A Vicar Apostolic, Peter Codde, consecrated as Bishop at Brussels, Belgium in 1689, supported the Jansenist movement and organized a Jansenist Church. He was elected Archbishop by the Chapter of Utrecht. During this episcopate he refused to sign the formulary of Pope Alexander VII and died without recantation in 1710. The Church at Utrecht joined with the French "Appelants" in their resistance to the Bull, "Unigenitus" (The Only Begotten), issued in 1713 by Pope Clement XI.

The Church of Utrecht kept up a supply of priests by sending their candidates with dimissorials to French Appelant Catholic bishops for ordination to the Holy Priesthood.

In 1723 the Chapter of Utrecht chose Cornelius Van Steenhoven, formerly Vicar General to the Archbishop of Utrecht, as bishop. He was consecrated by Dominique Marie Varlet, French Appelant Catholic Bishop of Babylon. The legitimacy and canonicity of this consecration was defended by Zeger van Espen, the famed canonist of Louvain University.

Bishop Varlet consecrated four Archbishops of Utrecht. After Varlet's death Bishop Meinhardt (the last consecrated by him) established the Bishopric of Haarlem in 1742 and the Bishopric of Deventer in 1752. Meinhardt's successor was consecrated by the Bishop of Haarlem, who maintained the line of succession that continues to our day.

The apostolic line of the Archbishops of Utrecht in communion with the Roman Catholic Church is as follows:

Frederick Schenck, 1560-1580
Sasbold Vosmeer, 1602-1614
Philip Rovenius, 1620-1651
Jam del la Torre, 1651-1661
J. van Neerchasel, 1661-1686
Peter Codde, 1688-1710

After the break from Roman jurisdiction:

C. van Steenhoven, 1724-1725
Cor. J. Barchman Wuytiers, 1725-1733
T. van der Croon, 1734-1739
P. J. Meinhardt, 1739-1767
Walter van Neuwenhuisen, 1768-1797
J. J. van Rhyn, 1797-1808
W. van Os, 1814-1825
J. van Santen, 1825-1858
Henry Loos, 1858-1873
John Heykamp, 1875-1892
Gerard Gul, 1892-1920
Fr. Kenninck, 1920-1978
A. Rinkel, 1937-1978
Marius Kok, 1978-1981
Antonius Jan Glazemaker, 1982-1999
Joris Vercammen, 2000-present

In November 2003 the Polish National Catholic Church was separated from the Union of Utrecht.

Bishops of the Polish National Catholic Church

Most Rev. Francis Hodur, consecrated Utrecht, Holland, September 29, 1907 (1866-1953)
Most Rev. Leon Grochowski, consecrated Scranton, PA, August 17, 1924 (1886-1969)
Rt. Rev. Francis Bonczak, consecrated Scranton, PA, August 17, 1924 (1881-1967)
Rt. Rev. Valentine Gawrychowski, consecrated Scranton, PA, August 17, 1924 (1870-1934)
Rt. Rev. John Gritenas, consecrated Scranton, PA, August 17, 1924 for the Lithuanian National Catholic Church (1884-1928)
Rt. Rev. John Jasinski, consecrated Scranton, PA, June 7, 1928 (1888-1951)
Rt. Rev. John Misiaszek, consecrated Scranton, PA, August 26, 1936 (1903-1972)
Rt. Rev. Joseph Padewski, consecrated Scranton, PA, August 26, 1936 (1894-1951)
Rt. Rev. Joseph Lesniak, consecrated Scranton, PA, November 16, 1937 (1890-1979)
Rt. Rev. Joseph Soltysiak, consecrated Scranton, PA, April 23, 1952 (1895-1973)
Most Rev. Thaddeus Zielinski, consecrated Buffalo, NY, September 2, 1954 (1904-1990)
Rt. Rev. Joseph Kardas, consecrated Buffalo, NY, September 2, 1954 (1898-1958)
Most Rev. Francis Rowinski, consecrated Chicago, IL, May 9, 1959 (1918-1990)
Rt. Rev. Eugene Magyar, consecrated Scranton, PA, June 29, 1963 for the Slovak National Catholic Church (1909-1968)
Rt. Rev. Joseph Nieminski, consecrated Scranton, PA, June 26, 1968 (1926-1992)
Rt. Rev. Walter Slowakiewicz, consecrated Scranton, PA, June 26, 1968 (1911-1978)
Rt. Rev. Anthony Rysz, consecrated Scranton, PA, June 26, 1968 (1924 -)
Rt. Rev. Daniel Cyganowski, consecrated Chicago, IL, November 30, 1971 (1921-1983)
Rt. Rev. Thomas Gnat, consecrated Scranton, PA, November 30, 1978 (1936 -)
Rt. Rev. Joseph Zawistowski consecrated Scranton, PA, November 30, 1978 (1918 - 2001)
Most Rev. John Swantek, consecrated Scranton, PA, November 30, 1978 (1933 -)
Rt. Rev. Thaddeus Peplowski consecrated Buffalo, NY, November 30, 1990 (1936 -)
Most Rev. Robert Nemkovich consecrated Scranton, PA, October 18, 1993 (1942 -)
Rt. Rev. Joseph Tomczyk, consecrated Scranton, PA, October 18, 1993 (1935 - 1995)
Rt. Rev. Casimir Grotnik, consecrated Scranton, PA, November 30, 1999 (1935 - 2005)
Rt. Rev. Jan Dawidziuk, consecrated Scranton, PA, November 30, 1999 (1937 - 2012)
Rt. Rev. Sylvester Bigaj,* consecrated Scranton, PA, November 30, 2006 (1959 -)
Rt. Rev. Anthony Kopka,* consecrated Scranton, PA, November 30, 2006 (1955 -)
Rt. Rev. John Mack, consecrated Scranton, PA, November 30, 2006 (1955 -)
Most Rev. Anthony Mikovsky, consecrated Scranton, PA, November 30, 2006 (1966 -)
Rt. Rev. Paul Sobiechowski, consecrated Scranton, PA, October 18, 2011 (1954 -)
Rt. Rev. Stanley Bilinski, consecrated Scranton, PA, September 14, 2012 (1953 -)
Rt. Rev. Bernard Nowicki, consecrated Scranton, PA, September 14, 2012 (1947 -)

*No Longer a Bishop.

How Did The Early Church View Apostolic Succession?

The first Christians had no doubts about how to determine which claimant, among the many competing new sects, was a true Church. The test was simple: Just trace the apostolic succession of the claimants. Did the teaching AND the teachers come down in a line from the apostles?

"Through countryside and city the apostles preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit to be bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this a novelty, for bishops and deacons had been written about a long time earlier. The apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry." (St. Clement of Rome, [A.D. 80] Epistle to the Corinthians, 42:4-5, 44:1-3).

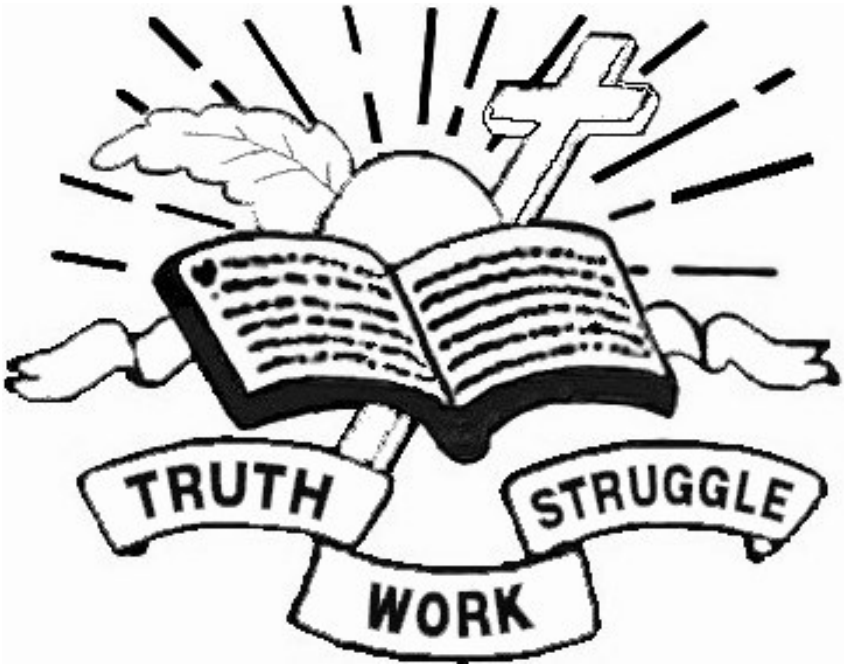
"When I was in Rome, I visited Anicetus, whose deacon was Eleutherus. And after Anicetus died, Soter succeeded, and after him Eleutherus. In each succession and in each city there is a continuance of what is proclaimed by Law, the Prophets, and the Lord." (Hegesippus, circa A.D. 180, Memoirs, 4:22:1)

"It is possible then for everyone in every church who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the apostles which had been made known to us throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors down to our time, men who neither knew nor taught anything like which the heretics rave about…Surely they wished all those and their successors, to whom they handed on their authority, to be perfect and without reproach." (Irenaeus, circa A.D. 180-199, "Against Heresies, 3:3:1).

Church Doctrine Commission

Polish National Catholic Church

2007

The Most Rev. Robert Nemkovich

(updated October 2013)