

Am-Pol Eagle

Vol. 48 No. 27

Thursday, March 22, 2007

Diocese says St. Adalbert Church is NOT a basilica

Alfred H. Karney

Contrary to common belief, St. Adalbert Church on the East Side is **not** a basilica according to diocesan officials.

For years many in the Buffalo area have referred to the red brick church with the dome at 212 Stanislaus St. as "St. Adalbert's Basilica." References have been made to the cornerstone, laid in 1890, that is said to include the word "basilica." The parish was called "Buffalo's only basilica" in the diocese's 1966 Millennium Book which carried the imprimatur of Bishop James McNulty.

It is listed also as "St. Adalbert's Basilica" in the official national Catholic directory for 2006. This large volume lists all the parishes in the country, grouped by diocese. (Reportedly the dioceses provide the data contained therein.) Moreover, the pastor and the parishioners proudly point to a document displayed in the church's museum they say attests to the church's basilica status.

However, rumors have been circulated both within and outside the diocese questioning its basilica status. In Milwaukee, Father Robert Switanowski, O.F.M. Conv., associate pastor at St. Josaphat's Basilica there stated, "I have heard that it is and I have heard it isn't."

Initially, the Am-Pol Eagle had reason to believe that the church should be included in its current series on Polish basilicas. While the basilicas were not all individually named on March 1 in the article that introduced the series, St. Adalbert's was included as one of seven Polish-American basilicas. It appears that that number needs to be reduced to six.

The church does not have any of the symbols of basilica status. Even though it is built in the style of a basilica, it does not have a canopy or a baldachin. Sister Regina Murphy, S.S.M.N., director of research and planning for the Diocese of Buffalo, agrees. She noted in a report based on her research into the matter in 1992, "Symbols that would give evidence to basilica status are not present in the church."

This, in and of itself, is not too damaging to the parish's contention. The canopy and the

tintinnabulum are not purchased until after a church has been elevated and St. Adalbert Basilica in Grand Rapids has never acquired them.

But the Grand Rapids basilica does have a document that explicitly states that it is a basilica. A copy of it appears in its 100th anniversary book. Coming from the pope and written in Latin, it contains a sentence which translates into English as "...We by Our supreme Apostolic power, through this letter, now ratify and raise in perpetuity that church, which is in the above named parish of the Diocese of Grand Rapids and is dedicated to St. Adalbert, to the dignity of a Minor Basilica". Father Switanowski also said that his church/which has been a basilica since 1929, also has a document explicitly stating that it has been elevated.

St. Adalbert's in Buffalo apparently does not have such a document. Issued in 1907, the document in its museum does proclaim an affiliation with St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It states that anybody who visits St. Adalbert's and who also visits St. Peter's or any other church within three miles of St. Peter's receives "indulgences, privileges, and spiritual favors." According to Sister Regina's report, "affiliation with a basilica, however, does not grant the affiliate church basilica status."

The diocese also does not have a copy of the necessary document. On Monday, Kevin Keenan, spokesperson for the Diocese of Buffalo, said emphatically, "There is no evidence that [St. Adalbert's] has ever been officially designated as a basilica by the pope." He acknowledged that the diocese does have a copy of the document granting it affiliation status.

There were no basilicas at all in the United States in either 1890 or in 1907. In its picture book, St. Josaphat's claims to have been only the third church to be elevated. St. Mary's in Minneapolis was elevated in 1926 and OLV in Lackawanna was elevated later that same year.

And as for the inscription on the cornerstone, Sister Regina states it "can be no more than an architectural reference...laid... 17 years before even affiliation status was granted. And, if St. Adalbert church had been a basilica there would have been no need to apply for affiliate status."