

Polish-American Basilicas: *Implications for the Journey in Faith and Grace, major and papal basilicas, obligations of basilicas*

The "timing" of this series had nothing to do with the Journey in Faith and Grace. It was far removed from my mind when I began the series. It did spawn the issue of basilica status of Buffalo's St. Adalbert's Church. I wrote in the introductory article that there are seven Polish-American basilicas. The week after that article appeared, a reader questioned St. Adalbert's basilica status in an email. I looked into it because I do not like making mistakes. It should not be inferred from anything that I wrote that St. Adalbert's will close. Nobody ever told me that.

The series was timely, however. The diocese says that the result of this journey will be a "revitalization" of our parishes, apparently because so many talents and resources will be combined. The basilicas featured in the series are role models for our parishes. Examples provided by these role-model churches for revitalizing our newly merged parishes are reviewed in the adjoining table.

Rome does not give a parish a document proclaiming it a basilica simply because the parish requests one. Becoming a basilica is like getting accepted into a prestigious university, like Princeton. You have to apply and send various documents supporting your application and you need letters of recommendation. Moreover, you would not carelessly lose your acceptance letter. Father Switanowski at St. Josaphat's Basilica explained that the document on display there is a copy; the original is locked in a vault.

There is more than one meaning of "basilica." The 1967 Catholic Encyclopedia gives as an example of a basilica the Stoa Basilik on the Areopagus in ancient Greece "where official and other business was transacted." It also refers to other "public buildings" in Rome at the time of Julius Caesar as basilicas. In fact, it provides a detailed description of "basilica" that matches a physical description of St. Adalbert's Church building. So, in this sense, the use of the term on its cornerstone is correct. However, there is also the canonical definition of the term which is the one upon which this series was based.

A few basilicas are major and the rest are minor. The website of St. James Basilica in Jamestown, North Dakota claims that a major basilica is one that has a "Holy Door" that is opened only in jubilee years and a papal altar. A papal altar is one at which only the pope or a delegate appointed by him can celebrate Mass.

Some basilicas are papal basilicas. (These basilicas were formerly called "patriarchal" but, according to Father Peter Rocca, pastor of Notre Dame Basilica in Indiana, the current usage is "papal.") According to the 1967 Catholic Encyclopedia, with one exception the papal basilicas are the ones that are assigned to a patriarch of one of the rites. St. Peter's is assigned to the Patriarch of Constantinople, the patriarch of Ukrainian and Ruthenian Catholics. Thus, this basilica is not the pope's home. As the patriarch of Rome, the

pope is the pastor of St. John Lateran and the Patriarch of Constantinople has graciously hosted him as his guest for 500 years already. St. Mary Major is assigned to the Patriarch of Antioch, the patriarch of the parishioners at St. John Maron on Wehrle Drive. St. Paul-Outside-the-Walls is assigned to the Patriarch of Alexandria, or of the rite that is common in Egypt. These four basilicas are also major basilicas and they are all in Rome.

St. Lawrence-Outside-the-Walls in Rome is a papal basilica but it is minor. It is assigned to the Patriarch of Jerusalem or of the rite that is common in Oriental countries like India. St. Francis at Assist is considered a papal basilica because St. Francis is interred there.

Finally, while it is an honor for a parish to be named a basilica, the title is not honorary. As the pope's church, a basilica has the responsibility for housing the pope when he visits the surrounding area. Moreover, the Jamestown basilica's website notes that basilicas have other obligations. They are "destinations of pilgrims." Their Masses must be celebrated with "great solemnity and perfection." On holy days, at least one of the Masses should be in Latin!

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