

***Preserving Polish Heritage – Pierogi, Priests and
Philanthropy***

David A. Odahowski
President
Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation



Polish American Priests Association
2008 Annual Convention
Orlando, Florida
March 31 – April 4, 2008

David A. Odahowski introduction

Our luncheon speaker is David A. Odahowski, President of the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation, Inc. The Foundation is recognized as one of the foremost charitable leaders in the state of Florida and for almost 35 years, has had broad interests in human service, education, health care, the arts, and anything to increase philanthropy and volunteerism. The Foundation has a keen interest in faith-based nonprofits and has benefited Catholic Charities, Bishop Moore High School, Morning Star School and Justice and Peace, to name just a few of the Foundation's Catholic beneficiaries. David was a member of Governor Jeb Bush's Faith-Based Advisory Board.

David began his work in the field of philanthropy in 1981 as Executive Director of the Wasie Family office in downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota a 50 million dollar office serving the needs of Marie F. Wasie (Wasielewski), widow of Stanley L. Wasie, trucking pioneer and faithful Catholic. The Wasie family and their philanthropy were greatly influenced by their long time religious advisor, Father Ladislaw Sledz, affectionately known as "Father Laddie" The Wasie Foundation has the largest privately endowed scholarship program in the United States benefiting Polish and Polish-Americans as well as being one of the largest private Foundations in Minnesota.

For our purposes today, you should know that David is a second generation Polish-America, born at Resurrection Hospital in Chicago, Illinois almost 52 years ago and has been a life long member of the Polish National Alliance. His formative years were as a student at St. Julianna Parish and school in Chicago under the watchful eye of the Franciscan Nuns. His father implored him to learn Polish, play the accordion – because "you will never go hungry" – and become a lawyer. He is an honors graduate from the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point – a nice Polish town – and was awarded the James H. Albertson Award, the highest award the University has for a graduating student. He has a law degree from Hamline University, Minnesota's oldest university, and was admitted to the Minnesota Bar. He does enjoy watching an occasional nostalgic rerun of the Lawrence Welk show, and now, especially in front of this group, he regrets not knowing any Polish.

David, who has worked his entire career in the field of charity, is a member of the newly created St. Maximillion Kolbe parish – the patron Saint of Charity. Bishop Wenski established the parish here in Orlando in 2006, just five minutes from David's home. David has no excuses for coming late to Mass! He has been married for 26 years to Heather Odahowski and has three children; a daughter, Julianne, who is pursuing her doctorate in violin performance and two sons, Peter and Daniel, who are studying business at Florida State University.

David Odahowski's Talk

Good afternoon to everyone and welcome to beautiful Winter Park, Florida – recognized as one of Florida's most historical and cultural cities. Saint Margaret Mary's Catholic

Church and SMM Catholic School have been on Park Avenue for over 50 years providing a special religious, educational, and social impact to this community and its visitors. Before we begin I have a confession to make – so bless me Fathers, for I have sinned. I partook of the corned beef and cabbage and green beer during Lent! My penance is that I am your speaker right after lunch but before both the scenic boat trip and visit to the Albin Polasek Museum and Sculpture Gardens. Having this talk come right after Divine Mercy Sunday and the role the Polish nun and Saint, Sister Maria Faustina Kowalska, had in making God’s word known and Wednesday’s celebration of Mass honoring the third anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II the Great – puts me under just a little bit of pressure, not to mention that this is April Fools Day!

This afternoon I want to talk to you and with you about Preserving Polish Heritage – Pierogi, Priests and Philanthropy. I hope to inform you about the size and scope of philanthropy across these great United States. I want to use Orlando as an example of a non-Polish community that has begun to preserve its Polish heritage. If we can do it here, you can do it anywhere! I will also put forth the case that the Polish American Priest Association is uniquely positioned to lead Polonia in preserving our heritage. I want to give you a GPS roadmap of the philanthropic resources in your community to not only preserve Polish heritage, but to serve the Church and to increase vocations! Finally, I have some ideas and, hopefully, some inspiration for the future work of the Polish American Priests Association.

So what do pierogi have to do with today’s topic? Pierogies have been part of the American Catholic Church since the Poles landed at Jamestown in 1607. It probably was not too long afterwards that they had a pierogi dinner to raise funds for the Church. Sauerkraut and sausage suppers and Polka Masses would come later as powerful fundraising vehicles; but it is the delicious, simple, and low cost pierogi dinners that built Polish parishes, Polish schools, and Polish community centers from Jamestown to the present. At six dollars for a dozen, they are the perfect combination of pasta and potatoes or other fillings, to not only give people something to eat, but to have them open up their wallets for a good cause! At today’s prices, however, you have to make and sell a lot of pierogi to get anything done. Just as an example, let’s say you needed \$10,000 dollars for something the Bishop asked you to do. If you were able to get all the ingredients and labor donated, you would need to make and sell 1,667 dozen or 20,000 individual pierogi! The Jamestown settlers might have had plenty of time on their hands but in the internet, cell phone, and microwave world we live in, who has the time? Who will help me get the pierogi ingredients; and who will help me make the pierogi dough; and who will help me stuff, fry and freeze the pierogi – but as you all know there will always be plenty of people to help you eat the pierogi! There has to be a better way! Let me suggest that Polish Americans need to create and participate in the abundant generosity of America known as philanthropy.

What does philanthropy mean? In an audience like this, your knowledge of Latin kicks in and you know that the root of philanthropy is Late Latin *philanthropia*, from Greek *philanthrōpia*, from *philanthrōpos* loving people, from *phil-* + *anthrōpos* human being --- translated meaning the love of mankind; love to mankind; benevolence toward the whole

human family; universal good will; desire and readiness to do good to all men; and for purposes of this talk, financial support to promote Polish heritage, the work of the Church, and for vocations!

So what is the size and scope of American Philanthropy? According to the Giving USA Foundation and The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2006, the latest year available, charitable giving totaled 295 BILLION dollars!

- 223 billion or 76% came from individuals,
- 37 billion or 12% from foundations,
- 23 billion or 8% from bequests, and
- 12 billion or 4% from corporations.

Please remember that individuals – “here on earth” and bequests of “those who have gone on to heaven” represent 84% of all the giving!

Where does American philanthropy go? 33% of all charity goes to religion, but as a percentage, religions share has fallen from roughly half of all giving in 1966 to one-third of all giving in 2006! 2006 giving is further broken down as:

- 14% to education.
- 10% to human service
- 10% to foundations – this has increased as a possible substitute or proxy for individual giving
- 9% to “unallocated”
- 7% to public benefit
- 7% to health
- 4% to the arts
- 4% to international
- 2% to environment and animals

There are many reasons for the reduced giving to religion including societal changes, increased number of nonprofit organizations – nearly a 40% increase in nonprofits since 1996 to over 1 million nonprofits in the United States, better data collection, the use of the 501(c)(3) tax status by religious organizations for various reasons, and the changes in donor attitudes from being passive givers to active, engaged, and involved philanthropists having many more choices!

It has been estimated that 41 Trillion dollars over the next 50 years will be transferred from one generation to the next with 6 trillion going to charity. How will the beneficiary generations deal with their new found wealth? How will the fourth and fifth generations of Polish Americans demonstrate their philanthropic support to Polonia? How will this affect the Church? What will it mean for vocations? Polish priests are in a unique position to assist both Polonia’s donor generation and beneficiary generation in answering these questions.

Polish-Americans have been very good at assimilating into American society, sometimes almost to a fault. Without being aware of their ethnic background, I can recall people I had known for years who, when Pope John Paul II the Great was elected Pope and when

Lech Walesa brought down the Iron Curtain, all of a sudden were Polish, too! Polish priests are able to awaken and rejuvenate this interest. The larger, well known organizations in Polonia have lost their imagination for engaging the younger generations. They have left a void by failing to nurture and develop the face book, myspace, iPod generations. There is an opportunity for the Polish Priest to fill that void. Polonia is also continuing to be geographically diverse. Illinois, Ohio, and Minnesota are great Polish places, but what about Colorado, Tennessee, and Florida? Your agenda also demonstrates that Polonia can be found everywhere – leave it to Bishop Wenski to find the link between Poland and Haiti! The common denominator for Poles is the Catholic faith. The Polish Priest is our navigator; linking past, present, and future.

I could not find any definitive studies on philanthropy and Polish-Americans, but just like many other ethnic and racial groups, Polonia has taken the “stumbling blocks” of discrimination and, through hard work and determination, turned them into the “stepping stones” of professional and financial success. The Stefanski Family – legacy of a 1.5 million dollar gift of land and cash for capital campaign of the Cleveland Central Catholic High School, the single largest corporate donation to the campaign, and The Wasie Family in Minneapolis are just two example of Polonia’s philanthropy. Many Polish Americans are trustees of Foundations located all across the country, including the likes of Martha Stewart – the homemaker guru; Steve Wozniak – Apple computers; and even Dan Marino – the Quarterback for the Miami Dolphins (his Mom was Polish).

Orlando is an adolescent in terms of its history and traditions. Let’s face it. The Diocese is only 40 years old! Orlando’s best attribute is that it has people relocating here from across the United States and world. If we can take all the good ideas that people have and put them into the Orlando context of community, we can have a World Class city.

Of course we have our lodge meetings and Christmas and Easter celebrations in Orlando but then someone got the idea to create a Polish festival called Polish Fest. For five years we worked like dogs during the year booking bands, making plans, and yes, making pierogi, golabski, and sausage for months in anticipation of Polish Fest.

We decided to take another approach and work on activities that were less strenuous. We created a Polish-American business directory listing accountants, veterinarians, and everything in between! We asked the library to do an inventory of their Polish books and then made the case for them to add more books, using *their* budget, and to give us space for our displays. We found out Poland’s Minister of Finance would be in Miami and invited him to speak before the Metro Orlando International Affairs Commission and the Economic Development Commission. We partially sponsored a reception for the Warsaw Philharmonic when they came into Orlando to play a concert and you would have thought we sponsored their whole trip! We wrote a small grant to the Kosciusko Foundation and were able to send four members of our community to Poland to teach English. We have encouraged, without money, various lectures at local colleges and universities. We even created our own 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization called the Polish Educational and Cultural Foundation, Inc. to give and to receive charitable monies. We teamed up with the Orange County Regional History Center in 2003 to work on an exhibit of the “Polish

Presence in Central Florida.” We had to scramble to get a picture of our new Polish Bishop into the exhibit and we were successful. When we were blest with a new Polish Bishop, it was as if all of our hard work was being rewarded! Lech Walesa came to Orlando last year and the University of Central Florida sought us out to make the Nobel Prize winner and friend of John Paul II the Great feel welcome. My point is that even if you are from Colorado, Nebraska, or Florida, with a little imagination you can make Polonia happen anywhere! By preserving Polish heritage, you are serving the Church by preserving a very dedicated tradition of Polish priests serving their people and their Church. Preserving Polish heritage should also increase vocations because young people want to see activity, commitment, and accomplishment. A vibrant Polish American Priest Association is a comfort, inspiration, and offers encouragement to those considering the priesthood and their families.

So where do you find the resources to undertake activities in your home town? Remember where I said 83% of all charitable contributions come from individuals? Who do you know that might have interests that are similar to yours? You never want to ask people for money, but you always want to be in position to help fulfill their desires to promote Polish heritage, the work of the Church, or vocations.

If you think you might want to seek funds from a corporation or foundation, the very best source is the Foundation Center. The Foundation Center was created in 1956 to provide unbiased and noncommercial information about corporate and foundation funding. There is a Foundation Center Collection in most libraries or in a library that is close to you. The Foundation Center can also be found online at www.foundationcenter.org. In the handout material I have for you, which for your convenience, will be distributed later, I have included a listing of all the Foundation Center Collection Libraries in the United States. In addition, I asked the Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership Center at Rollins College to conduct a search listing all of the foundations that have an expressed interest in “Poland”, “Polish”, or “Polish-American”. They also undertook a search for all foundation trustees with Polish last names!

Another resource that is often overlooked is the local community foundation in your city or town which has a mission to serve the entire community. A community foundation is a public charity that raises funds for endowments and only spends the interest for the community – the savings account for the community. If you are familiar with the local United Way, they raise money and spend it – the checking account for the community! The handout materials provide the web address for a national community foundation locator.

State and local historical and humanities commissions or committees should not be overlooked. We live in a diverse society and these local commissions or committees have the obligation to tell the story of Polonia just the way they tell the stories of other ethnic groups. These types of grants could be for exhibits, historic interpretations, or cultural tours. These types of grants might also be used to preserve various Polish Churches for their architecture and stained glass windows for their historical significance – like St.

Joseph's at 10th and Mechanic Streets in Camden, New Jersey for \$454,355. I will find that grant and make it into a pdf. file to share with others.

It is beyond the scope of this talk today to discuss the types of grants to write but, basically there are two kinds of grants: outright grants and restricted grants. The most common restriction is some sort of matching requirement, such a \$ 1 for \$1 match. Here's a little tip: sometimes the match can be a soft match in terms of in-kind contributions or volunteer time. In 2007, the Independent Sector has calculated the average value of an hour of volunteer time at \$18.77 or the equivalent of three dozen pierogi! I have never heard of a pierogi matching grant!

This GPS roadmap to resources could lead to greater future work for Polonia and this organization. It is with great respect that I offer up some ideas – as a resource – for your consideration.

- For the general public, English speakers and their stories of meeting Pope John Paul II the Great.
- Invite Father Michael Heller – Polish Priest, physicist and Templeton Prize Winner. Get someone or a foundation to front the costs, but have it include a special meeting with you. Father Heller is a “rock star.”
- Polish Churches and Stained glass windows – preserve and catalog.
- Oplatek project – a tradition beyond Polish Americans – families need it!
- U-Tube and Wikipedia PAPA and related activity - graduations, baptisms, celebrations – Epiphany Parish in Detroit (1924-1989) as an example.
- “Elders Wisdom” project, oral history – we are not getting any younger.
- Mike Krzyzewski – Duke Basketball coach. Have him talk about his faith and tips for recruiting – VOCATIONS!
- Link up with other nationalities – Haitian's talk – who knew?
- Public radio, TV, and letters to the editor.
- Polish films into film festivals; Polish history and humanities projects.
- State and city resolutions.
- Youth segment to PAPA, miniature golf, go carts, softball or other activities.

As we are between the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday and on the eve of the third anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul the Great, we have much to be thankful for and much to do.

Polish-Americans and their Priests possess the willingness to work hard, the ability to learn, and are not ashamed to be taught!

We need to be grateful for what we have received, and grateful for what we can give. So let me conclude with a story.

Dziadzia lay dying in his bed. While suffering the agonies of impending death, he suddenly smelled the aroma of his favorite pierogi with fried onions wafting up the stairs. He gathered his remaining strength, and lifted

himself from the bed. Gripping the railing with both hands, he crawled downstairs.

Downstairs, he leaned against the door frame, gazing into the kitchen, where if not for death's agony, he would have thought himself already in heaven, for there, spread out upon waxed paper on the kitchen table were hundreds of his favorite pierogi. Was it heaven? Or was it one final act of love from his wife of sixty years, and a Busia, seeing to it that he left this world a happy man?

He threw himself towards the table, landing on his knees in a crumpled posture. His parched lips parted, the wondrous taste of the pierogi was already in his mouth. With a trembling hand he reached up to the edge of the table, when suddenly he was smacked with a wooden spoon by his wife.

"Back off!" she said. "Those are for the funeral."

The moral of the story and of this talk is that pierogi, priests and philanthropy can help preserve Polish heritage, the work of the Church and increase vocations – but don't mess with Busia's pierogi!