



POLISH HERITAGE SOCIETY OF GRAND RAPIDS

March 2021

Swienconka: a Tradition of Giving Thanks on Holy Saturday



Olivia Szczygiel at age 6 months with basket for Swienconka

By Natalia Szczygiel

On Holy Saturday before Easter Sunday, families throughout metro Grand Rapids will bring carefully prepared baskets of food to local parishes to celebrate Swienconka – the Polish tradition of giving thanks for the abundance that God provides.

At least 7 parishes will be participating. (See page 2 for parishes and times)

During a brief service, the priest blesses the participants and the baskets to commemorate the end of the Lenten fast. The baskets often contain a number of items that are symbols and reminders of the resurrection of Jesus.

If you aren't familiar with Swienconka, consider participating this year! It's a beautiful tradition that instills a sense of wonder in children and adults alike, maintaining a link to our Polish Catholic heritage going back to the 7th century.

As a child, I vividly remember preparing our Easter basket with my mother, Bozena Maska. I recall helping to dye our eggs in onion or beet peels, placing all the food items neatly so they would fit into the basket and adorning the basket handle with fresh greens and white ribbon. Entering the church on Holy Saturday with our

basket, smelling the delicious contents, and praying quietly before and during the blessing is a moment in time I now want to share with my kids.

The basket is typically lined with a white linen, decorated with sprigs of boxwood, the typical Easter evergreen, and covered with white linen or decorative lace. Some of the most popular food contents and their symbolism are below:

Butter (Maslo) - Often shaped into a lamb (Baranek Wielkanocny) or a cross reminding us of the goodness of Christ.

Easter Bread (Chleb) - A round loaf topped with a

cross or a fish, symbolic of Jesus, the Bread of Life.

Horseradish (Chrzan) – This distinct taste symbolizes the Passion of Christ.

Decorated Eggs (Pisanki) - Indicates new life and Christ's Resurrection from the tomb.

Sausage (Kielbasa) - A pork sausage, symbolic of God's favor and generosity.

Ham (Szynka) - Symbolic of great joy and abundance. Some prefer lamb or veal. The lamb also reminds Christians that the Risen Christ is the "Lamb of God."

Smoked Bacon (Slonina) - A symbol of the overabundance of God's mercy and generosity.

Salt(Sol) - A necessary element in our physical life. Symbolic of prosperity and justice and to remind us that people are the "salt" of the earth.

Cheese (Ser) - Symbolic of the moderation Christians should have at all times.

Candle – Often marked like the Paschal Candle lit during the Easter Vigil, it represents Christ as the Light of the World.

Colorful Ribbons and Sprigs of Greenery - Attached to the basket as signs of joy and new life in the season

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ids@gmail.com](mailto:phsgrandrapids@gmail.com).

The Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids promotes an appreciation of the Polish and Lithuanian culture in the metro Grand Rapids. The Society publishes this newsletter monthly. We invite story ideas and content contributions. For more information, please contact Matthew Gryczan or Marilyn Lignell by writing to [phsgrandrap-
ids@gmail.com](mailto:phsgrandrapids@gmail.com).

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of spring and in celebration of the Resurrection.

Linen Cover - Drawn over the top of the basket for the trip to church where it is joined with the baskets of others to await the blessing.

When the elders in our family were asked why this tradition of "Swienconka" must continue, they replied that we need to celebrate the meaning of Easter and preserve our Polish culture. For us children, the toughest part was not eating the blessed food until Easter Sunday!

The baskets can be as large or small as you like: most families already have wicker baskets that already have been used for Easter candy. A number of families also already color Easter eggs, and red eggs are a traditional color for the basket. Local meat markets and specialty grocery stores have the lamb butter, kielbasa and other food items.



Join my family and me in celebrating the Blessing of the Easter Baskets! Here is a list of parishes that have held Swienconka in past years. We've double-checked with each parish on this list regarding times and locations, but other parishes may be holding the service as well.

Parishes that Celebrate Swienconka



Rev. Monsignor R. Louis Stasker readies for Swienconka at St. Adalberts in 2018

Churches that will celebrate Swienconka:

Holy Spirit, 2230 Lake Michigan Drive NW, Grand Rapids, (616) 453-6369, scheduled at 1 p.m.

Our Lady of Consolation, 4865 11 Mile Rd NE, Rockford, 49341, (616) 866-0931, noon

Sacred Heart of Jesus, 151 Garfield Ave SW, Grand Rapids, 49504, (616) 459-8362, noon

St. Adalbert Basilica and

St. James, 654 Davis Ave NW, Grand Rapids, 49504, (616) 458-3065, 11 a.m. in the Basilica Center

St. Anthony of Padua, 2510 Richmond Street NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504, (616) 453-8229, 1 p.m.

St. Isidore, 628 Diamond Ave NE, Grand Rapids, 49503, (616) 459-4731, 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

St. Paul the Apostle, 2750 Burton Street NE, Grand Rapids, 49546, (616) 949-4170, 12:30 p.m.

Last Chance to Apply for PHS Scholarships

The PHS is encouraging college-bound students of Polish/Lithuanian descent to apply for financial aid offered by the society.

The deadline for applications is March 15, so students should contact their high school or college counselors to start the application process.

To view the scholarship

guidelines and application form, visit the PHS website at <https://polishheritagesociety.com/scholarships>. To obtain more information on the program, contact Scholarship Committee Chairperson Mary Ann Bergevin by writing to the PHS email address [phsgrandrap-
ids@gmail.com](mailto:phsgrandrapids@gmail.com).

PHS Member News

By Marilyn Lignell

If you haven't done so already, please take a minute to fill out the form on the back of this newsletter and send in your 2021 dues or pay online conveniently on our website using PayPal. Your membership dues are what keeps this newsletter coming. Thank you for your support!

The Polish Heritage Society welcomes new life member Angela Marie Walejewski-Zasuwa!



The PHS Membership Committee would like to highlight a couple of board members.

Elena Chaidez, PHS Corresponding Secretary, has Polish roots that come from her mom's side of the family. Elena's grandma (Nana) had six girls and one boy, which made for large family gathering on Sundays when you added in the 23 grandchildren. Dinner, polkas and stories were always a part of the evening. Secret recipes were sometimes shared along with talks about faith. Elena wanted to become involved in the Polish community so she joined

the Polish Falcons about 15 years ago. "I felt like it was important to expand my knowledge of Polish heritage and also volunteer for an organization that helps preserve these important customs that I treasured growing up."

Elena went on to say, "My Nana always stressed that it didn't matter how much or little you had, you could always give your time. That's a big reason why I do this. Time donations are just as important as monetary donations for groups

like ours." Elena also does an amazing job keeping us updated with current events and information on the PHS Facebook page.

Dennis Ziolkowski is a longtime member of the Polish Heritage Society and is serving as Recording Secretary on the PHS Board.

Dennis joined the board at the suggestion of Greg Rosloniec and has been on the board for approximately seven years. "My parents are both 100% Polish." Dennis' three kids are also

100% Polish and were all part of the Polish Dance Group at one time. His family still passes the Oplotek on Christmas Eve and indulges in paczki on Fat Tuesday. Dennis is proud of his Polish roots and expressed it through his polka band called Rhythm Styx. "My Busia helped write Polish lyrics phonetically for the band." He currently is playing in the Stan Mroz Orchestra. Dennis also volunteers on the AAC Credit Union Board and Supervisor Committee.

Meeting Minutes — January 18

By Dennis Ziolkowski

(Abbreviated for space) A meeting held via Zoom due to COVID restrictions. President Adam Porczynski called the meeting to order at 6:04pm.

Attendance: Mary Ann Bergevin, Adam Porczynski, Dennis Ziolkowski, Anthony Zasuwa, Richard Panek, Michael Jasperse, Matt Gryczan, Theresa Bonham, John Theisen, Greg Rosloniec, Elena Chaidez

Minutes from the last meeting and the financial report were approved.

Correspondence: Received from Grand Rapids Public Museum a thank you for the gift of the banner. Motion by Matt, seconded by Richard to authorize Elena to sign for the society that we did receive and gifted the banner to them. Motion passed.

Thank You to Michael, Matt, Theresa, and Marilyn for working with Meijer Gardens on the The Gardens reported the most successful zoom presentation program. 217 total sign up, 170 participated, and 108 stayed the full allotted time we were given.

Busia queen will stay on till next festival and a new one will be picked.

All accounting items are in. IRS needed some items to be sent directly to them. MaryAnn needs to send from August to year end to the accounting firm.

Food orders with Laura. Tabled for more information.

New Business: Richard, Matt and Marilyn. Great job on newsletter, quality has increased and we are sending out aprox. 20 more subscriptions than before. Matt will not be running for re-election this May. Will be writing his second book. Would like to be looking for a marketing, newspaper experienced person to take his place.

Motion by John, seconded by Elena to have 2 signatures on checks over \$1,000. Motion passed. Motion by John, seconded by Anthony, that the second signature be either one of our vice presidents. Motion passed

Adam is looking to see if we can transfer some monies to a savings account since the checking pays no interest. Not knowing if we even have a savings account

Close meeting: Motion by John second by Matt. Meeting ended at 6:54pm. Motion carried

Join the Polish Heritage Society to receive our monthly newsletter and other benefits!

Annual Student Membership for full-time students through college \$5

Annual Adult Membership \$20

Annual Family or Business Membership \$35

Lifetime Membership \$150

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You can join the Polish Heritage Society online by going to our website at <https://polishheritagesociety.com/>, filling out the Membership form and paying by using the PayPal Button.

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