



The Local Polish Catholic Mission 8 Oliver Grove, South Norwood London SE25 6EJ

South Norwood is an area of South London and a part of the Outer London Borough of Croydon. It developed as a community in about 1836 when the first railway was established. Oliver Grove, together with other roads nearby, was part of a private estate built between 1860 and 1870. The two houses which now belong to the Polish parish were built at that time.

Early Beginnings

The Polish parish in Oliver Grove was set up in 1950 by its first priest Father Gajecki and Polish families who settled in the area after the end of World War II. From the very beginning the community were very active organising themselves into different groups (Scouts and Cubs, the Altar Ministers, Parents Association etc.), which had their meetings in private houses. The Polish school was also set up in 1950 with classes held first, in private homes and later, on the premises hired from neighbouring Catholic schools. Masses were celebrated in an English Catholic Church in Bingham Road in Addiscombe.



1960s - The first parish house and the parish hall

1960s were very important for the Polish community. In 1963 a Polish couple, Mr and Mrs Brzeski, who owned the house at 6 Oliver Grove, donated it to the parish. The Polish school moved into its premises and was named after a great 16th century patriot, Grand Marshal Jan Chodkiewicz. In 1966 the parish house was extended to create a parish hall where, thanks to enormous efforts of the whole community, Poles could now organise their performances, cultural events and social gatherings.

1980s – The second parish house and the church

1982 - Pope John II met Polish people at Crystal Palace during his visit in England.

1983 - the parish bought a house and land at 8 Oliver Grove and soon afterwards building of the Church of Merciful Jesus started. It was completed and consecrated in 1985.

1988 – Mothers and Toddlers group was set up

1990s – Father Alexander arrives at the parish

1992 - Father Alexander arrived in 1992 having worked in Poland for 10 years and later in Zambia for 10 years

1993 – A picture and relics of sister Faustyna were brought into the church from Poland during a special ceremony.

1995 – The first edition of the parish monthly *Bez Tytulu* (Without a Title) was published and a flower arranging club *Ikebana* was set up.

1998 – Seniors Club was set up by Father Alexander and the Polish President Lech Walesa came to visit.



2000s - The Polish community continues to thrive

After the accession of Poland to the European Union in May 2004 the parish community has visibly expanded. The school is bursting at the seams and Masses, church festivals and social events are very well attended.

The Saturday school

It will be celebrating its 60th Anniversary this year. The school now has a record number of 250 pupils children and 15 teachers.

Lessons on Polish language, culture, history and religion take place in the morning from 9.30 to 1 p.m. and are taught in all possible spaces available, even in the sacristy of the chapel.

The Polish Community today

New members join in and the young generation continue to work hard together with the old one. The following activities take place:

- Folk Dance Group "Karolinka"
- Cubs and Scouts groups
- "Ave Verum" Choir for adults
- Salsa Club for adults
- Flower Arranging Club
- Seniors Club
- Ladies' Club
- Mothers and Toddlers Group

