

Week 1 Report of Our Virtual Walk from Poland to Rome 9-22 through 9-28.

During this week we collectively walked 310 miles and had 19 participants. Sources for photos are given in smaller front near the image. You can click on images to increase their size for a better view. The green line on map of Poland indicates places we visited. A red line on the route map indicates general route for entire walk, image right.

We all met at the Columbia Airport on Sunday the 21st of September where we boarded a flight to Charlotte-Douglass Airport and then transferred to our flight to Gdansk, Poland. We left on Sunday evening because the flight to Poland took about 11 hours. Since it was a long evening flight, we could catch some sleep while we traveled and thus be ready to actually begin our pilgrimage around noon on Monday. PAT is free software. Copyright © 2010, 2013 by Ian Macky for both maps

Route map



Fortunately for us, all of the countries we are visiting on our fall Pilgrimage are part of the European Union and, therefore, English is now more common in signage and more people in these countries will know some English, because the Polish language is not easy to learn. After our safe arrival in Poland, we began

P O L A N D
to explore Gdansk.

But first a few notes about Polish history and religion. Religion in Poland is rapidly declining, although historically it had been one of the most Catholic countries in the world. In 2018 the Pew Research Center reported that Poland was rapidly moving toward being a secularized nation. The Pew study compared the disparity of religious beliefs between the youth and elders of 100 nations. Poland was the top of the list of those 100 countries in terms of that disparity. Although most Poles (71%) describe themselves as Roman Catholic, only 28% attend Mass weekly. This has led to a significant decline of the influence of the Catholic faith in the country.

The fact that Catholicism is still nominally the dominant religion in Poland is primarily due to the impact of the Holocaust conducted by the Nazis during WW II, which resulted in a significant decline in religious and ethnic minorities and not just the elimination of the Jewish Poles. The Catholic church has been considered a major source of history and culture within Poland as a result of the purge of other religions and ethnic groups during WW II.

Traditionally, the ancient Poles were pagans and from the beginning of its statehood, religious freedom was the norm. Beginning in 966 AD when Poles began being baptized, the old religions were gradually replaced by the Catholic faith. But some pagan beliefs remained and there were a series of pagan rebellions in the early 10,00s. By the 13th century however, Catholicism was the dominant religion, although a significant number were Jewish. The two religions co-existed peacefully.

By the fifteenth century, the Protestant movement gained ground in Poland, but Catholics were still dominant. In 1573, the Warsaw Confederation assured religious tolerance would continue.

However, Poland was divided between Prussia and Russia in the late 1700's and some Poles were. When Poland was divided between its neighbors in the late eighteenth century, some Poles were subjected to religious discrimination. And it is the reason that some Polish surnames sound distinctly German or Russian.

Before WW II, there were about 3,500,00 Polish Jews living in the country; they comprised about 10% of the Polish population. Even before WW I, there was growing anti-Semitism throughout Europe, including in Poland. During WW II about 90% of the Jewish population died. Today, the Polish Constitution assures religious and cultural freedom and grants the right to establish educational, cultural and religious institutions to all groups.

Poland has been partitioned and has changed ownership through wars many, many times over the years. Some of these times were internal Polish rebellions but most were foreign countries wanting the area—Swedes, Lithuanians, the Duchy of Warsaw, Prussians, the Germans during WW II, and several times, by the Russians. At other times Poland was a country in title but was actually subservient to the Russian Tsar. Poland had brief periods of being its own country but even after WW II it was under Russian control as part of the USSR. It wasn't until the USSR broke up that Poland was finally in control of itself. No wonder then that the Russian invasion of Ukraine scares the Poles greatly! They fear they are probably next in Putin's sights and the recent Russian drones flying over Polish territory has increased their fear!

Our first stop in Gdansk was at St. Mary's Church, AKA in Polish as Bazylika Mariacka. It is a co-cathedral in the center of the Gdansk. St. Mary's was completed in 1502 in Gothic style and is one of the largest brick churches in the world. It is considered a major city landmark and is called by the city's inhabitants the "Crown of Gdansk". With Oliwa Cathedral, it serves the Archdiocese of Gdańsk as a co-cathedral. Gyddanyzc, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons



St. Mary's has three aisles with the transept and main nave being about the same size. Its vaults are amazing. They had to be restored after fire damage during WW II. The corbels and buttresses inside the church support the vaults.

It currently has two bells which were cast in 1970. The previous bells were destroyed in the fire during WW II. The bells weigh 17,310 pounds and 5,700 pounds; the larger bell sounds in F sharp and the smaller one in C sharp. The Ambo for the church is shown right. Zala, CC BY-SA 4.0

<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, right image



The picture also shows one of the many plaques that decorate the walls of the church. At right is the main altar.

Diego Delso, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right i

Then we headed to Oliwa Cathedral, formally known as the Archcathedral Basilica of the Holy Trinity. The cathedral was completed in the 14th century. Like St. Mary's, it is also brick and Gothic in style. It is known for its great organ and has protection as a historical monument.

The Archcathedral has three-naves with a transept and a multi-sided closed presbytery, finished with an ambulatory. A bell tower overlooks the crossing of the naves. It has many art works in Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo and Classical styles.

Diego Delso, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, interior of cathedral left, and image of organ below left. Bartosz MORĄG, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, right image

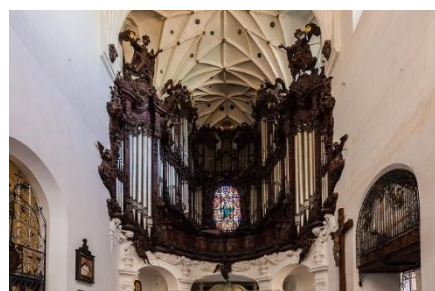


The two images, left and right, show the interior and exterior of the Oliwa Arch cathedral.



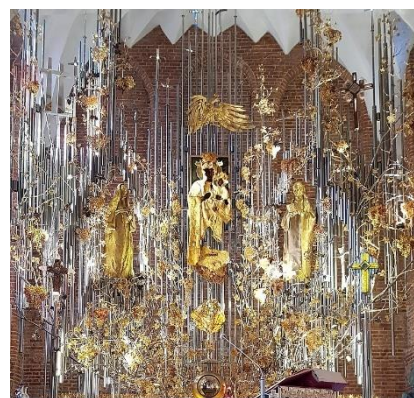
The great organ is shown below, left. The Archcathedral is part of a Cistercian monastery.

The church was raised to the level of a cathedral in 1925 when Gdansk was named as a diocese and in 1992, Pope John Paul II established Gdansk as an archdiocese with the cathedral elevated to Archcathedral rank. The church has a total of 23 altars, mostly Baroque and Rococo in style. We went to mass while we were there.



Our final church stop in Gdansk was to St. Bridget's church in the central part of the city. It was pretty much bombed out of existence during WW II but was rebuilt based on the original plans which date back to about the 14th or 15th century. It was named after St. Bridget, a Swedish saint, whose remains were laid in the place in this spot for a few days when her body was being transported from Rome to Sweden. The main attraction of this church is the amber carved altar which is a work in progress. Several other statutes and carvings of amber can be seen in the church.

Adam Ladzinski2020, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, image left. Robert Niedźwiedzki, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, image below right shows the detail of the central image at left



Of course, we also visited some sites in the city, including the old town which has been reconstructed since WW II. Below are some of the sights we saw in walking around the city.

Calle Dlugie Pobrzeze, below left.

Diego Delso, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, below left

Neptune's Statue in Old Town below

right. Reinhold Möller, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, image below right.





The Old Tower, below left Reinhold Möller, CC BY-SA 4.0
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We also visited the WW II Museum, shown below, right. We saw many artifacts such as tanks and other gear used in the war. The architecture of this place astounded me. I can't imagine how it was



constructed at this angle! Jroepstorff, CC BY-SA 4.0
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, image right



Then we headed southeast to the village of Gietrzwałd where the cathedral, the Basilica of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, is also a Marian shrine. It is the site of the only Marian Apparition in Poland that is recognized by the Catholic



Church. The Basilica is another red brick church, shown below, left.



BartLoPhotography, CC BY-SA 4.0
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In the summer of 1877 between late June and mid-September, the Virgin Mary appeared to two teenage girls multiple times, begging them to pray the rosary daily. Mary followed that message with messages similar to those she announced at Fatima which are more well-known. As news of Mary's appearance spread thousands of pilgrims headed to Gietrzwałd. The church had already been a pilgrimage site due to the miraculous image of Our Lady of Gietrzwałd and by 1500 was already celebrating her birthday. In the image in the church, Mary holds the child Jesus, with angels surrounding them. There is an inscription of Ave Regina Coelom, Ave Domina Angelorum (Hail Queen of Heaven, Hail Lady of Angels) on the image. After Mary appeared to the two teens in 1877, the church was enlarged by fusing together the new neo-gothic portion with the existing gothic elements already present. The miraculous image of Our Lady of Gietrzwałd was crowned by Primate Stefan Wyszyński in

1967. Because of the similarities of the apparition to that which occurred at Lourdes, Gietrzwałd is sometimes colloquially referred to as 'the Lourdes of Poland',

The apparitions were approved by the Catholic Church on the centenary of their occurrence in 1977, and a pilgrims' house was built. St. John Paul II sent a letter to the shrine on its 125th anniversary in 2002, thanking Mary for her presence and maternal protection.

Then we turned west and slightly south, heading to the city of Bydgoszcz. The city straddles two important rivers, the Vistula and a tributary, the Brda, making it an important inland port. It is the 8th largest city in Poland. The metropolitan area includes not only the city but several surrounding communities with a population of 800,000.

Beginning in the Middle Ages, Bydgoszcz served as a royal city of the Kingdom of Poland until the country was divided. Because of its location, it further developed during the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century. Along with industrialization, it became an important academic site with several universities

and cultural schools. Currently, Bydgoszcz also plays a role as the biggest center of NATO headquarters in Poland.

The gród (fortress) of Bydgoszcz was built by Casimir I between 1037 and 1053. St. Giles Catholic church was the first in that location, but it was destroyed by the Germans in the late 19th century. The city was captured and occupied by Germanic forces then recaptured by the Poles several times over the years of the Polish–Teutonic War (1326–1332).

In 1346, King Casimir III of Poland gave Bydgoszcz a charter as a royal city which provided the city with privileges such as minting coins and the right to trade on the Brda and Vistula rivers. It was following this charter that the Castle was built. Queen Jadwiga (Hedwig) promoted the building of a Carmelite convent in 1397, the third in Poland after Kraków and Gdańsk.

Other wars continued to impact the city such as the Polish–Lithuanian–Teutonic War in 1409 and the Thirteen Years' War in 1454–1466. During this war, the city built defensive walls for protection and the present Gothic Cathedral of St. Martin and St. Nicolas was built. A Bernardine monastery was constructed in 1480 and they built the cathedral, left. Joczko, CC via Wikimedia Commons



The city continued to grow with various enterprises developing such as a salt depot and mint. The Jesuit

arrived in the city in the early 1600's and established a college there.

The Saint Vincent de Paul Basilica, image right, was built and dedicated to return of Bydgoszcz into Polish hands once more. Pit1233, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons It is the largest church in Bydgoszcz and one of the biggest in Poland, having space for 12,000 people. It is modeled after the Pantheon in Rome. We attended Mass here while we were visiting this city.



During WW II, the city was once again bombed and occupied. There were many deaths of the Polish occupants due to the invasion and with many more deaths as the Nazis conducted mass executions of Polish residents.

When the Russian Red Army advanced In spring 1945, they occupied Bydgoszcz and the Germans were expelled with city being returned to Poland. Those German residents who had survived were expelled. The communist regime stayed in power until the late 1980's.

In 1999, reforms in the Polish government which made Bydgoszcz the seat of the governor of the province. Casimir the Great University opened in Bydgoszcz. Currently Bydgoszcz is the biggest NATO headquarters in Poland with a major facility for training troops.

We did some sight seeing in the city including, the river area with the granary, below left, the old water tower, below center, and the buildings on the Brda River at dusk, with the 2004 Tightrope sculpture, the bottom of the three pictures.



Diego Delso, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left.
 User:Piotrus, CC BY-SA 3.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>, via
 Wikimedia Commons, interior image below KazimierzP /
 fotopolska.eu, CC BY-SA 3.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>, via
 Wikimedia Commons, below left and right



Next, we headed to a small village near Konin called Licheń Stary or Old Licheń to see the largest church in Poland and one of the largest churches in the world. The Basilica of Our Lady of Licheń is a Catholic church at the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows, Queen of Poland. The church took 10 years to complete and was finished in 2004.

Donations from pilgrims to the site paid for the church. It's tower measures 464 feet tall. The nave is 394 by 253 feet, and the dome is 321 feet high. The church is dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows, Queen of Poland, whose icon is displayed on the basilica's main altar. It is one of Poland's principal pilgrimage sites.

So why is this huge church in this small village? It was built to accommodate the large number of pilgrims who come to this village annually. In 1813, a Polish soldier fighting under Napoleon in German territory was seriously wounded. He called on the Virgin Mary to keep him alive, so he didn't die in a foreign place. According to the soldier, Mary appeared to him, comforted him and told him he would live. He described Mary as being dressed in red and holding a white eagle (a national symbol of Poland). She was wearing a golden crown. The soldier was told by Mary to take an image of her, and to put it in a public place so people could come and pray to her and receive her grace. The soldier returned to Poland and found a picture and hung it in a forest. Soon after he died and was buried in Licheń. Two years later another man was visited by Mary who told him the country would have a cholera epidemic and a war. She told him to take the icon hung on the tree by the soldier to a better place where people would see it and visit to pray to her and that they would donate to build a better church. Mary also said she could help with the future epidemic. The man did as instructed, hanging the icon in the small Licheń church. The pilgrims came in great numbers to pray to Mary and to donate and many received



blessings and relief from cholera. A larger church was needed to accommodate them all. Poland's largest organ, which is also the fourth largest in Europe and thirteenth largest in the world is in the church, installed in 2007. The church is still a major pilgrimage site in Poland. In 1999, Pope John Paul II blessed the Basilica. Diego

Delso, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, view left KazimierzP / fotopolska.eu, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, Right KazimierzP / fotopolska.eu, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, below left





Example of the decorations in the church, left. Fountain in Licheń Park, , right

Wydra666 at pl.wikipedia, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

After visiting the church and some sights, we headed to Plock to visit the Sanctuary of Devine Mercy, for our first

encounter with St. Faustina Kowalska who lived for a time in a convent in Plock and where she had her apparitions of Jesus. This is the place where the Divine Mercy devotion was revealed to St. Faustina in 1893. On the advice of her confessor, she kept a diary of her visions and wrote the prayers for the novena of Devine Mercy, which were later published. She was canonized as a saint by St. Pope John Paul the II. She died at the age of 33 from TB in a Warsaw sanatorium.



This photo was taken by Przemysław JahrAutorem zdjęcia jest Przemysław JahrWykorzystując zdjęcie proszę podać jako autora:Przemysław Jahr / Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, Sanctuary left.

We visited the sanctuary, left, and then also visited Plock Cathedral, the Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Masovia, right. It was originally built in the 12th-century in Romanesque architectural style. Several



Polish monarch are entombed within. It is the oldest historical monument in the city. Fallaner, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons , Plock Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary, right

The cathedral burned and was reconstructed at least twice with the last reconstruction in later half of the 1500's as a Renaissance style cathedral. However, the external architecture remains more like the style of North Italian brick churches than Renaissance style. Another restoration happened in the early 1900's. It has been designated as a Historic Monument of Poland.

And then we headed to Warsaw. There are many interesting place in and near-by to Warsaw. Our first stop was to visit the Archcathedral of St. John. It is the mother church of the arch diocese of Warsaw and a UNESCO world heritage site. It is Gothic in design and was built in brick. There are three cathedrals in the city, but this is the only Archcathedral. It is also considered one of Poland's pantheons.



Gerard Stańczak, CC BY 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

All of the photos of the church show primarily the top of the building with it's distinctive green roof because the cathedral is located in the old town with many buildings crowded around it.

The cathedral has several chapels within, including a St. John's Chapel, an Immaculate Conception Chapel and a Literary Chapel. There was major damage to the cathedral during WW II but after the war ended, the cathedral was rebuilt with the exterior reconstruction based on paintings of the 14th century church. The photo below left shows the

severity of the damage.



Unknown photographer, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, left. Practically nothing remained of the interior furnishings, so the interior is of a more modern design, as shown in the photo right. Jorge Láscar from Australia, CC BY 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, right.

At one time, before the monarchy of Poland was abolished, the cathedral was connected to the royal palace, but that connection no longer exists. But because of this history, it was sometimes referred to as the royal cathedral. We attended Mass



here before moving on.

Since we were close to the rebuilt royal castle, we next took a tour there. Chris Olszewski, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, below left. Currently the building is used as a state museum as well as a national historical



monument. The castle served as the residence for the Polish Monarchy until the late 1800's and royal business was conducted there. The castle holds a significant collection of Polish and European art.

It was and still is used for important events. The Polish constitution was drafted there in May of 1791, the first of its type in Europe. It was the seat of the Polish head of state from 1918 until 1939 and is currently the second most visited art museum in Poland, next to Krakow.

Like many other important buildings, it was bombed during WW II. In 1965, the remaining wall fragments were designated as a historical monument, and the palace was reconstructed from 1971 to 1984. In 1980 along with the surrounding old town was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

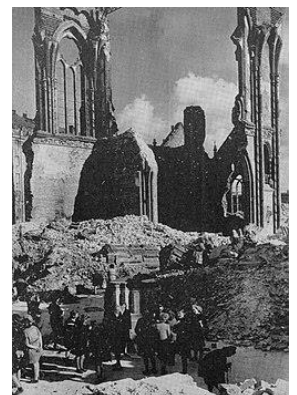


Next, we went to St. Florian Cathedral, formally known as the Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Florian the Martyr. While there had been a catholic church on this site since the late 1500's, the reason for constructing this cathedral came in the late 1800's. At that time Poland was not an independent country, but what had been the Frech Duchy of Poland became under control of the Russian Empire. The Russians proceeded to build more than 20 Russian Orthodox churches in their new possession, and the Cathedral was built in direct response to this foreign religious intrusion into Warsaw. The Cathedral was built with two 246 feet towers to command a large presence in the city. And the picture at left certainly shows the commanding presence of this cathedral. Adrian Grycuk, CC BY-SA 3.0 PL <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/pl/deed.en>>, via Wikimedia Commons, left

As with St. John's, St. Florian's also was destroyed by the Germans as they withdrew from Poland in 1944. It wasn't until the 1950's that reconstruction began. The cathedral was re-opened in 1972. The picture right shows the destruction to St. Florian's after the Germans left the city. One of the reason the German Army's targeted the churches was because both the Jewish population and other civilians used them as sanctuaries.

Leonard Jabrzemski, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, right

St. Florian's was raised to a minor basilica in 1992. Because the diocese covers over 1200 square miles with 160 parishes serving over one million Catholics additionally supervision of the parishes is required.



The third cathedral is the Field Cathedral of the Polish Army also known as the Church of Our Lady Queen of the Polish Crown. This cathedral serves as the main garrison church for the entire Polish army, although it is mainly used by the troops stationed in Warsaw. All major military religious celebrations and religious feasts are held in this cathedral. It sits opposite the Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising Monument near Old Town. Originally it served as a parish church but became the seat of the Bishop of the army prior to WW II and its cellars were used as a field hospital during the war. It was destroyed by German bombing in 1944.



User:Darwinek, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons The church was restored, and was re-opened by 1960. It remains the seat of the bishop of the army. However, the title of bishop of the army was really only a title since the country was under communist rule and religion played no role in the army any longer. When Poland was liberated from the USSR, the church regained the status of a cathedral and continued serving as the cathedral for the military.

After visiting this cathedral, we went to the nearby Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising. The uprising occurred in 1943 as the Germans entered the Jewish Ghetto to begin dispose of the Jewish population as they had been doing elsewhere.

But the young Jewish men and some young women who were poorly armed refused to go peacefully and gave their lives trying to protect the women, children and elders of the ghetto. Of course, they were not able to defeat the well-armed Germans and were killed for their efforts. But their efforts are memorialized in the monument and each year the date of the uprising is celebrated by the city. There is also a museum dedicated to the Uprising.



Then we individually had some free time. Some of the group chose to visit the Copernicus Science Center.

Kapitel, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left The science museum is located on the bank of the Vistula River. It is an interactive museum, designed to encourage hands-on participation in the exhibits. It is the largest institution of its type in Poland and one of the most advanced in Europe.

Another group took a tour boat ride on the Vistula River. Those folks saw several city landmarks from the water, as well as some local wildlife.

And some of our participants just wanted to explore Old Town by foot. They enjoyed some shopping there as well.



Then it was time to explore some attractions outside of the city. First, we headed 26 miles west to Niepokalanów to visit the Sanctuary of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. We attended Mass there.

Fczarnowski, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, image left. The following link will take you to a brief video (32 seconds) that shows the interior of the Basilica. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Niep-basil_2025fc_1080p.ogg

Fczarnowski, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons citation for video

Niepokalanów monastery, also known as the City of the Immaculate Mother of God in Teresin was founded in 1927 by Maximilian Kolbe, who was later canonized as a saint-martyr of the Catholic Church. A local man offered land to Friar Kolbe and the monastery took off, growing rapidly so that just prior to WW II, it was the largest in the world. Publishing was the core business of the monastery.

During WW II, the monastery served as a sanctuary for injured soldiers, war refugees, and many Jews. The friars care for all, no matter their nationality or race. But the Gestapo arrested Fr. Kolbe and four other friars and sent them to Auschwitz concentration camp. It is well known that Fr. Kolbe offered up his own life for another prisoner who had a family.

During the war, the Friars were self-sufficient and the many folks residing in the monastery helped according to their abilities with growing food, taking care of livestock, building needed furniture, etc. The Franciscans kept up with common prayer as much as possible. Toward the end of the war in January of 1945, the monastery was bombed, and six friars were killed and many building destroyed. About 50 of the friars lost their lives during the war.

Post WW II, the Monastery was re-built, and a parish was established in Niepokalanów. The printing business resumed was reopened. By decree of the Holy See, in 1980, the church was named a minor basilica and was visited by Pope John Paul II in 1983.



Kolanin, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

The we headed a bit south to Swinice Warckie, where St. Faustina was born. It is a small village with about 640 people residing there. It is first mentioned, historically around 1300, and by 1458 was considered a town but it lost that designation in 1500. It is not known if the requirements



for being a town had changed, or if the town lost some of its population resulting in the demotion. However, it was where St. Faustina was born and where her parents are buried. The grey building above is the Sanctuary of the Birth and Baptism of St. Sister Faustina. It is the parish church she attended and where she was baptized. The photo on the left is of the baptismal font where she was christened, with her picture above the altar.

We ended our week here. Next week we will continue on to Częstochowa to see the famous Black Madonna and learn about the importance of this icon. Thanks for participating!

Your Tour Director,
Kathy Scharer

Week 2 Report of Our Virtual Walk from Poland to Rome 9-29 through 10-5

During this week we collectively walked 395 miles and had 19 participants. Sources for images are given in smaller front near the image. You can click on images to increase their size for a better view. The green line on map of Poland indicates places we visited this week. A red line on the route map indicates general route for entire walk, image right.

PAT is free software. Copyright © 2010, 2013 by Ian Macky for both maps

Route map



We left Niepokalanów Monday morning and headed to Częstochowa where in the Jasna Góra Monastery contains a miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary called the Black Madonna. Częstochowa is on the Warta River and has almost a quarter of one million inhabitants. The Jasna Góra

Monastery serves the Order of Saint Paul, the First Hermit of the Catholic Church. The Icon of the Black Madonna draws millions of pilgrims every year from around the world. The area was first settled in the middle ages around the 11th century and was mentioned by a bishop of Kraków in historical documents from 1220.

Fortifications of the Jasna Góra Monastery, left. Interior of Monastery church, right



Janptak, , via Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 3.0 PL, via Wikimedia Commons, left. Andrzej Otrębski, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, below right

Częstochowa had a Roman Catholic parish church by the late 1300's. The village was located near the Royal Castle at Olsztyn. Częstochowa developed along a busy merchant road from Lesser Poland to Greater Poland. The route where the Częstochowa settlement was located became a



busy route between lesser and greater Poland and the settlement developed over time into a large city.



By 1382, the Jasna Góra Monastery was founded and two years later received the famous icon of the Black Madonna—although it wasn't so famous at that time. But the fame of the good works of the icon spread and pilgrimages to the site increased greatly, increasing the size of the city. The history of the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa is not known for certain but some believe it was painted on cedar table by St. Luke the Evangelist and was later discovered by Helena in 326 who gave it to Constantine the Great (her son). Documents from Jasna Góra indicate it was brought to the Polish king from Constantinople. Later legend has it that the King was riding through Częstochowa, when his horse refused to go further and the king saw in a dream that he was to turn the icon over to the Monastery.

The Black Madonna of Częstochowa Unknown source, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons , left.

Because of the invasions of Sweden in the early 1600's, the Monastery was turned into a fortress. By the 1655 Swedish invasion, the monastery served as a place for Polish resisters to fight off the Swedes, who had destroyed most of the city. About 50% of the population were killed in that invasion and 60 % of the homes destroyed. But the monastery helped the city which fared better than other nearby places and Częstochowa recovered more quickly as a result.

At the beginning of the 1900's, Częstochowa was one of the leading industrial centers of Russian Poland. It's location on the river made it convenient for shipping goods, land prices were relatively low, and the monastery drew many pilgrims each year who patronized the small business of the city.

World War I began in July 1914 and by early August the city of Częstochowa was abandoned by the Russian army who had been stationed there and left to the German Army. The Germans began executing citizens, both Jewish and others—Romani, Poles who tried to protect the Jews, and sometimes even those Poles who weren't interfering in any way. Between 1914-1918 the city was cut off from most of the markets, which resulted in widespread poverty and unemployment. Additionally, many factories were shut down. The Germans urged residents to move out of the city and many did.

But the Monastery was not as severely impacted. Beginning in April of 1915, the Jasna Góra Monastery had been protected by Austria-Hungary because Emperor Franz Joseph I was a staunch Catholic and he supplied Austrian soldiers to protect the Monastery. It remained under Austrian control until 1918.

In 1925, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Częstochowa was created. The city grew in size, when between 1928 and 1934, several local settlements and villages were incorporated into city limits. In



1939, the population of Częstochowa was 138,000, which made it the eighth-largest city of Poland. Cathedral Basilica of the Holy Family, left. Frees, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

During WW II, the Germans systematically began the extermination of the Polish nation. On 9–11 November 1939 the Germans carried out mass arrests of dozens of Poles, including the mayor, vice-mayor, teachers, students, activists and local officials to terrorize the population but most of these individuals were released within a relatively short time. Later in 1940, the Germans made mass arrests and sent some of those individuals to concentration camps in Poland. However, some were massacred in the nearby forests. The victims of the massacres included school principals, teachers and students, all kinds of skilled craftsmen, engineers, pharmacists, local officials, merchants, and even 20 girl

scouts! Further executions of local Poles were carried out by the Germans throughout the war. The Germans continued these practices throughout their occupation of Poland.

In April of 1941, the Germans gathered the Polish Jews of Częstochowa into a ghetto. During the course of the war about 45,000 members of the Jewish population of the city were killed. Before the German occupation, the city was considered to be a great Jewish center; afterwards the city was almost entirely without any Polish Jews.

After WW II, supported by the communist's plan for rapid industrialization, Częstochowa rapidly developed again into a major city. The steel mill production rapidly increased and tourism also brought people to the city. And Pope John Paul II's visits to the city to pray before the Black Madonna multiple times after his election as Pope also increased the number of pilgrims coming to the city. One of the most moving and extraordinary votive offerings at the Shrine is the one left by St. John Paul II. Currently exposed in a special container on the altar of Our Lady is the belt of his cassock, shot through and bloodstained during his assassination attempt in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981. Pope Benedict XVI also made a visit there in 2006.

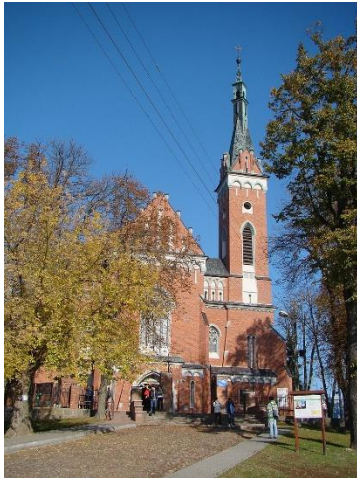
Various miracles have been attributed to the Black Madonna Icon of Częstochowa. The most famous one involved outnumbered Polish defenders of Jasna Góra Monastery holding off the much larger Swedish army in 1655. The Black Madonna served as the inspiration for the Polish troop. When the Poles won, the Black Madonna was declared to be the Queen and Protector of Poland.

The Black Madonna was also believed to help out the Poles in others battles such as the Polish-Soviet war of 1920. She is also credited with healing all types of illnesses, conversions, helping people survive during various times of war, and even documented cases of resurrections. In addition, people have ascribed personal miracles to Our Lady of Częstochowa, such as overcoming addiction. The Pauline Monks who live at the Monastery have meticulously recorded these miracles dating back to the early 1400's.

From Częstochowa, we next headed to Wąwolnica. The legend of this town is that in the early part of the 700's, Prince Krak from Kraków visited the area and founded the town. Prince Krak supposedly slayed the dragon of Wawel so the coat of arms for the town of Wąwolnica has St. George on it.

Wąwolnica is one of the oldest settlements in what is known as Lesser Poland. Initially, the western section of Poland was created and was referred to as Upper Poland when more territory to the southeast was added, it was called Lesser Poland. Historical documents at Holy Cross Monastery indicate that the priests from the monastery convert the people of Wąwolnica to Catholicism in 1027 AD. The area had been inhabited since the stone age. And by the 1200's the town was fortified and a stop on a major highway in Poland. King Casimir II gave the town a royal charter around 1370. A castle and St. Adalbert's royal chapel were also built around then.

Wąwolnica was completely destroyed by fire in 1567, so the King ordered it to be rebuilt. The royal chapel was converted to a church for the Benedictine monastery in 1638. Later the town was destroyed by various wars and declined in population as a result. At the beginning of WW II, the Germans occupied the town and forced the Jews into a ghetto. Some were conscripted into forced labor. By march of 1942 they murdered many and the rest sent to a concentration camp and were executed there.



right

After WW II ended, the communist regime had control over the town and much of the town was burned down again in May of 1946 for what the communists termed under-ground anti-communist forces. But the town again was rebuilt later on. The church of St. Adalbert, pictured left, remain after the town was burned the last time. It was built between 1907 and 1914 in the "neo-Vistula" style, in red brick. In 2001 Pope John Paul II raised the church to the status of minor basilica in 2001. In the remains of an old gothic church, next to St. Adalbert's is a statue of Virgin Mary of Kębło - the object of special veneration and numerous pilgrimages, right. Leszko20, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, Janmad, CC BY 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons, Image of Virgin Maryr,



The tradition of veneration of the statue of the Virgin probably extends to the end of the 1200's when Tartar raiders invaded the area. The raiders set up camp in the village of Kębło near Wąwolnica. The Tartars then stole goods and captured townspeople and villagers. One of the stolen items the Tartars had was a statue of the Virgin Mary which they placed on a big bolder.

But Polish Troops began fighting the Tartars and won the battle. When the Tartars tried to flee, the Statue of the Virgin rose up in the air above the Tartars and hung over their heads, terrifying the tartars who then abandoned their loot and their prisoners and fled. The statue then returned to the bolder. The prisoners, grateful for the intervention of the Virgin, decided it was God himself who had rescued them. The location of the Virgin became a pilgrimage site and the owner of the land had a wooden church built on the site with the statue placed inside.

In 1700, when the old wooden church was falling apart, the Superior of the Benedict Monastery at Holy Cross arranged for the statue to be moved to the parish church in Wąwolnica where there was more room for pilgrims to venerate the statue as well as for greater security of the Virgin. The wooden church in Kębło was then removed. The church in Wąwolnica which was built in the 14th century only has the chancel remaining which has been rebuilt into a chapel for the shrine to Our Lady. We visited both St. Adalbert's and the chapel before leaving for Holy Cross Monastery.

Holy Cross Monastery at Świąt Krzyż is the oldest pilgrimage site in Poland. It is in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains (Holy Cross Mountains National Park). This Benedictine monastery has documented history from the 11th century. There is some suggestion that it may have been the site of the site of the first Catholic church in Poland. As the name of the Monastery suggests, its relics are from the true cross on which Jesus was crucified. The relics were gifted to the monks of Monastery by Saint Emeric of Hungary.

Prince Emeric (later named a saint) went to Poland on a hunting expedition at the invitation of Boleslaw I, Poland's first crowned king. But the Prince got lost in the forest. He encountered a deer with a shining cross between his antlers. Soon he had a vision of an angel who promised to save Emeric if he gave up his most prized possession, a relic of the holy cross, to the monastery. The angel then led him to the monastery where the monks cared for him as he recovered. Emeric remembered the angel's words and left the relic of the holy cross with the monks. A new monastery with a church and complex was then

built on that hilltop to house the relic. In the 18th century, a new baroque basilica was erected near where the old monastery still stands. From the Monastery we headed south to Krakow.

Krakow is officially known as the Royal Capital City of Krakó. It is the second-largest following Warsaw. Krakow is also one of the oldest cities in Poland. It is situated on the Vistula River, which is always an advantage to a city in terms of commerce. Kraków had been the capital of the country until the mid-1500's and has traditionally been a leading center of cultural, artistic and academic excellence. The city is a UNESCO World heritage city since 1978 and is often described as one of the most beautiful cities of Europe.

Originally Krakow was a settlement on the banks of the Vistula , and became a important trading place for Central Europe by 985. By 1038, it served as the Royal city for the Polish Monarchy and continued to serve this purpose until the later part of the 11th century. In 1918, Krakow claimed importance, serving as the nucleus of national spirit. At the beginning of WW II, German Nazis took over the city and made it their main headquarters in Poland. The Nazis first forced the Jewish population into a Ghetto and then sent them to nearby Auschwitz for extermination. However, the city was spared from destruction, unlike many other areas of Poland. We set out to discover some of the historically Catholic churches of this city.

As we learned on our pilgrimage in week 1, Poland had been a very Catholic country. So, it was especially significant to the population when in 1978, Karol Wojtyła who was the archbishop of Kraków, ascended to the papacy as Pope John Paul II. He was the first non-Italian pope in 455 years. And Krakow Poles were especially delighted since grew up in the shadow of Krakow at Wadowice only about 35 miles from the city.

As we began to further explore the city, we started out in Krakow's main market square at St.

Mary's. The official name of the church is the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary which is Kościół Wniebowzięcia Najświętszej Marii Panny in Polish but is commonly called St. Mary's church.

Andrzej Otrębski, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, St. Mary (left) and Mickiewicz Monument in the main market square, left



It is a Brick Gothic church. Built in the 14th century, its foundations date back to the early 13th century and serve as one

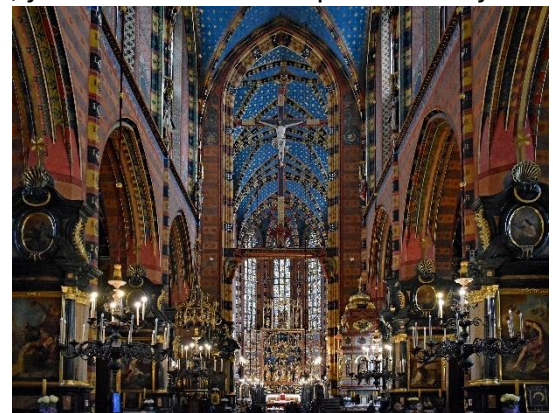
of the best examples of Polish Gothic architecture. Standing 262 feet tall, it is particularly famous for its wooden altarpiece carved by Veit Stoss, added in the late 1400's. It is a gorgeous piece created in late Gothic design. If you enlarge the picture of the nave below right, you can see this altarpiece clearly.

Zygmunt Put, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. Main Nave of St. Mary's, right

A trumpet signal is blown every day on every hour on every day of the year by an actual person—not a recording. This is called the Hejnat mariacki (St. Mary's bugle call), and the trumpeter stands at the top of the taller tower of the church to play his tune. The signal is a five-note bugle call played four times, facing each of the cardinal directions (north, south, east, and west). The melody breaks off mid-note to commemorate a legendary trumpeter who shot in the throat by a Mongol arrow while the trumpeter was playing the alarm call. The Mongols were attacking on the city, and

the tune has been played with the same interruption ever since. This tradition started in the middle ages and was used to signal the opening and closing of the city fortifications or to warn of danger. The noon hejnat (bugle call) can be heard across Poland and abroad because it is broadcast live by Polish Radio.

We briefly stopped by the statue in the middle of the square at the statue of Adam Mickiewicz, (seen in the picture of St. Mary's above). He was the greatest Polish Romantic poet of the 19th century,



and this statue was unveiled on June 16, 1898, on the 100th anniversary of his birth, in the presence of his daughter and son.

Then we headed to the gothic Cathedral which is on Wawel Hill and is part of the Wawel Castle Complex and is a national sanctuary which served as the coronation site of Polish monarchs. It formally titled the Archcathedral Basilica of Saint Stanislaus and Saint Wenceslaus, (Polish: Bazylika archikatedralna św. Stanisława i św. Wacława). It is nearly 1000 years old.



Ingo Mehling, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, Southern facade of Wawel Cathedral, left

This is the third church on this spot. One was destroyed by invaders, and another by fire. The current church was begun in the 14th century and was expanded over the years. You can easily see the differences in architectural styles just looking at this picture. The exterior is adorned by side chapels and mausoleums, most notable being the golden-domed Sigismund's Chapel you see on the right side. The cathedral is the official seat of the Archbishop of Krakow.

In addition to regular masses and other sacramental services, the cathedral often is the site of annual celebrations. The day after

Karol Wojtyła's ordination to the priesthood, he said his first mass at the Cathedral in 1946 and in 1958 was ordained as an auxiliary bishop there. Later he became the Archbishop of the cathedral. It was certainly an important place in his life! GNU Free Documentation License, cathedral altar, right

The main altar, pictured right, was built about 1650. There is a



lovely painting of Christ on the cross over the altar from the 1700's. Four gold pillars hold up a canopy which holds the coffin of the national patron Stanislaus of Szczepanów.

User:Tsadee, CC BY-SA 3.0, via

Wikimedia Commons, left



Below the cathedral

is St. Leonard's Crypt, left above. The crypt dates back to the 11th century when Krakow as the royal city and capital of the kingdom of Poland. It was built in Romanesque style and served as the final resting place of several important Polish monarchs. We spent some time in personal prayer at the cathedral before visiting the castle next door. In the picture right you can see how the castle backs up to the cathedral.

Monika Towiańska, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, image right

The picture left below shows the courtyard of the castle. The "Polish Dragon" symbolized in the sculpture

below right and found on the Castle grounds, is described in Wincenty Kadłubek's Polish Chronicle. During the time of King Krak the dragon appeared and was said to swallow things whole. The dragon needed weekly offerings of cattle to keep it from attacking humans.





Two of the king's sons were told to kill the dragon but they could not kill the beast by traditional methods such as swords or arrows. The sons came up with the idea of stuffing a cattle skin with smoldering sulfur which killed the dragon. But this led to fighting among the sons with the younger son killing his older brother in order to claim sole responsibility for slaying the dragon. When the word came out that the younger son had killed his brother, the younger son was banished, leaving the sister, Princess Wanda to accede to the kingship. As with other legends, variations on this theme can be found in the literature. Currently the Castle houses a museum that has many well-known art works within, so we took some time to view these before moving on to Sts. Peter and Paul Church.

The Church of Saints Peter and Paul was the first entirely Baroque building in Krakow. It is pictured below center, and the altar is below left. The king at that time, King Sigismund III Vasa, provided the funds so that the Jesuits could build the church which was completed in 1619 and consecrated in 1635. Today it serves as a parish church.

Anna Saini, CC BY-SA 3.0 PL, via Wikimedia Commons Church of St. Peter and Paul, right



Ludwig Schneider, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons Main altar of the Church St. Peter and Paul.



Niches contain statues of several Jesuit saints including Aloysius Gonzaga, Ignatius of Loyola, Stanisław Kostka and Francis Xavier.

The interior of the church has several vaults with stucco designs which have quite elaborated designs; you can see one of those designs in the picture of the altar. Other decoration include scenes from the lives and deaths of St. Peter and St. Paul as well as statues of some Polish saints. The painting above the altar depicts giving the keys to St. Peter is by Józef Brodowski. There are also many statues of saints, some beautifully designed tombs, and some sculptures in this church. It also has several beautiful chapels.

Our final visit to a Catholic site in Krakow was to the Shrine of Devine Mercy in the Łagiewniki district of Krakow, which houses a miraculous Devine Mercy Painting. If you recall from earlier, Sr. Faustina Kowalska had a vision of the Christ of Devine Mercy. Several paintings were created during 1830s and 1940s based om her descriptions. The last of these paintings was kept at the Łagiewniki

Shrine. Many copies of this image have been placed in Catholic churches world-wide. The original painting at the Łagiewniki Shrine has been associated with many miracles.

The miracle that was used in the suit for St. Faustina's beatification involved a woman named Maureen Digan from Massachusetts. She had suffered from swelling in her lower legs for many years, had had multiple surgeries, including an amputation and suffered a great deal of pain. In 1981 she went to the tomb of Faustina and prayed for relief. While she was praying, she reported hearing a voice telling her to "ask for my help and I will help you". After making that prayer, the pain in her legs stopped. When she returned to her home, she went to her physician in Boston who said she was healed that the physician could not explain; 4 other doctors confirmed those results. None of them could account for her recovery.

The site we visited in Łagiewniki has two separate parts: a neo-Gothic convent for the sisters with a chapel containing the original painting as well as relics of Sr. Faustina and a very modern basilica in an elliptical shape. This basilica has an approximately 264-foot viewing tower. Sr. Faustina's remains are buried in the basilica. The Basilica was built between 1999 and 2002 due to the growing numbers of pilgrims visiting the site. Karol Wojtyła was a frequent visitor before becoming Pope.

In 1981 when Sr. Faustina's diary was published more visitors arrived daily. And Łagiewniki became even more popular to pilgrims after Pope John Paul II claimed the place as the capital of the Divine Mercy in 1985. Later in 2000 when Sr. Faustina was canonized, even more people came to the place. Pilgrims to the site have also included two more recent popes: Benedict XVI and Francis.

The new basilica, shown below, was built between 1999 and 2002 at the site of a monastery of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. In 1966, the remains of Sister Faustina were moved to the church and in

1968 Cardinal Karol Wojtyła designated the church as a shrine.

Jarostaw Dubowski / fotopolska.eu, CC BY-SA 3.0
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

The building was designed to resemble a boat and has a 253-foot observation tower that resembles a mast.

The altar of the chapel, below. Uszatku, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons



Five thousand people can visit the Basilica at a time while the



chapel has 1800 seats. The Divine Mercy painting is kept in the main sanctuary house of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy as well as some

relics of St. Faustina.

Our next stop was at the Auschwitz Concentration site, where it is estimated 1.1 million people died. Some were sent to the gas chamber, some died by firing squads, some were worked to death, some starved, some died having been used by doctors as Guinea pigs to test various ideas- many amounting to torture, and some were killed in punishments for infractions or as an example to others. Today there is a museum that documents what happened there. Two specific Catholic Saints are associated with Auschwitz, Edith Stein and Maximilian Maria Kolbe. We learned something about St. Kolbe when we

visited Niepokalanów Monastery and how St. Kolbe offered to take the place of a man who had children and who had been selected along with 9 other men for punishment by being buried in an underground vault without food or water because another man from their cell block had escaped.

What happened that Edith Stein was at Auschwitz? Edith Stein was born into German Jewish family. However, as a teenager she became an agnostic. She decided to become a nursing assistant in 1915 and worked at an infectious disease hospital for a time. She also entered the University of Freiburg and advanced to the doctoral level, completing a dissertation under the well-known phenomenologist, Edmund Husserl and receiving a PhD in Philosophy in 1916.

Stein read a biography of Teresa of Ávila who reformed the Carmelite Order of Nuns and decided to become a Catholic. She was baptized on 1/1/1922. She wished to enter the Carmelites at that time but was dissuaded by the Archabbot of Beuron who was serving as her spiritual mentor. She then went to teach at a Jewish school but as a requirement of the Nazi government she had to quit that work in April of 1933. She was then accepted as a student to study religion at Discalced Carmelite monastery in Cologne. She became a novice in April of 1934 and was then known Teresia Benedicta a Cruce. She continued her studies, taking final vows on April 21, 1938.

After taking her vows, she was sent to the Netherlands; The Carmelite order thought she would be safer in the Netherlands than in Nazi Germany. But on August 2, 1942, all Catholics who had been born Jewish living in the Netherlands were arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Auschwitz for extermination. She went to her death forgiving her murderers.

St. Pope John Paul II beatified Teresa Benedicta of the Cross a martyr in 1987; she was canonized by him in 1998. As a martyr, only one miracle was needed for her canonization. That miracle was that of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross curing 2-year-old Benedicta McCarthy. In 1984, Benedicta had taken 19 times the lethal dose of Tylenol thinking it was candy and was taken to Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston for treatment. But the doctors said they couldn't save her, and she would die from liver failure due to necrosis. They put her on the liver transplant list but were not hopeful a liver would be found in time. Her father called the family and others to pray to Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, for whom the child had been named, to intercede. Soon afterwards, a nurse walked by the child's ICU room and saw Benedicta sitting up, apparently healthy. Various tests were taken that showed a complete return to normal liver functioning. Dr. Ronald Kleinman, the pediatric specialist who treated the girl, testified about her recovery to church tribunals, describing what happened as miraculous. Benedicta grew up to be healthy with no known complications from her accidental poisoning.

We made a lot of stops this week and also had some good Polish food. Thank you for participating!

Your Tour Director,
Kathy Scharer

Week 3 Report of Our Virtual Walk from Poland to Rome 10-6 through 10-12

During this week we collectively walked 373 miles and had 19 participants. Sources for images are given in smaller font near the image. You can click on images to increase their size for a better view. The green line on map of Poland indicates places we visited this week. A red line on the route map indicates general route for entire walk, image right.



P O L A N D



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by Ian Macky for both maps **Route map**



On Monday morning we left Auschwitz and started walking to Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, somewhat west of Krakow, to visit the Monastery there, shown below.

Scotch Mist, CC BY-SA 4.0
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, image left. The monastery was commissioned by Mikołaj Zebrzydowski, a military ruler in the

Krakow area in 1602. Zebrzydowski had attended a Jesuit College as part of his education. One day he was looking out of his castle viewing the surrounding hills and had a vision of a Calvary trail of the Passion of Christ modeled on the one outside of Jerusalem along with a monastery. So Zebrzydowski undertook

the steps to have the Calvary and Monastery built. The Basilica, shown below, houses the miraculous icon of Our Lady of Kalwaria. We walked along the Calvary trail while we were here. There are a series of chapels commemorating the various stops on the trail, such as the Chapels of Crucifixion, Deposition, and Entombment of Christ and we took a few minutes to pray at these stops before proceeding on the trail. Only a few of us could enter each chapel at a time. Kalwaria Zebrzydowska monastery is the only one of Poland's pilgrimage sites that has been named a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which occurred in 1999. The town of Zebrzydów, named after the founder of the Monastery, was established in 1617 as pilgrims to the monastery needed places to eat and sleep.



No machine-readable author provided. Piotrus assumed (based on copyright claims), CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Image of the Basilica of St. Mary's façade, left. Piotr Osada, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, interior of the St. Mary's Basilica, right



Pope John Paul II made several visits to Kalwaria Zebrzydowska during his time as Pope. It was at this monastery Pope John Paul II voiced the words of his motto: "Totus tuus ego sum, et omnia mea tua sunt. Accipio te in mea omnia. Praebe mihi cor tuum, Maria." ("I belong entirely to you, and all that I have is yours. I take you for my all. O Mary, give me your heart"). However, most sources suggest that only "Totus tuus" was his motto, so perhaps in saying the above quotation he had combined his motto with a prayer.

This site is the one most closely connected to the life of St. Pope John Paul II. During his childhood and as a young adult he visited the site and participated in pilgrimages with his family. He and family members came here on pilgrimage after the deaths of his mother and his brother. The when he became a priest and later Archbishop, he also visited several times. Since he grew up near here, only about 10 miles away, it is not surprising that he developed an attachment for praying here.

Then we headed about 10 miles away to Wadowice, the town where Pope John Paul II was born and lived during his childhood. The history of the city is similar to other Polish cities we visited. Many different rulers and many wars affected the city. After WW II, in 1945 Wadowice retained its town status and was a centers of business and transportation. In 1989 when Poland was being transformed, much of the local industries were deemed inefficient and thus became bankrupt. But fortunately for the area, both the historical heritage and the fact that it was the birthplace of Pope John Paul II resulted in increased tourism keeping the city alive. It is estimated that more than 200,00 people visit Wadowice annually. It is also a center for small businesses. Our first stop in the city was to the Pope's home.



Aphopis4, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons



Dom Rodzinny JP II, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, family dining room

The above building housed the first-floor apartment that Pope John Paul II was born in and grew up in until he left for University in 1938. It is currently a museum and holds a collection of objects owned by his family. The family rented two rooms plus a kitchen in 1919, and Karol was born on May 18 in 1920. When his mother died in when he was 10, he and his father then rented only one room plus the kitchen. The building became a museum in 1984; it not only preserves the original structure but also commemorates Pope John Paul II's life and work in Poland prior to his becoming pope. The picture above right shows the dining area of the apartment, part of the kitchen. What struck me immediately when I saw the dining area was how closely it resembled the dining rooms of Polish families I knew in Chicago in the 1980's.

We then visited the parish church where Pope John Paul II worshiped in his childhood, the Basilica of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Bazylika Ofiarowania Najświętszej Maryi Panny in Polish)



Krzysztof Cabak, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, left Pimke, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, below right.



After our visit to the Basilica, we headed across the mountains into The Czech Republic at Ostrava. Again, the green line shows the route we took in the Czech Republic.

The Czech Republic is roughly 1/3 the size of Poland as the route map below shows but still has some important Catholic sights for us to visit. Around 863 two brothers from Thessalonica (part of Greece), Sts. Cyril and Methodius were asked to come and evangelize to the Moravians. At that time, the area was known as the Great Moravian Empire.

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The brothers learned the Slavic language because they knew that would be most successful in converting the population that way. Cyril created an alphabet for the language now known as the Cyrillic Alphabet. The two brothers had a major impact on the development of learning and the spread of Christianity in the Slavic areas of Europe.

For many of us, we grew up learning that the area now known as of the Czech Republic and Slovenia was actually called Czechoslovakia. The division into two countries happened with the end to

the USSR in the 1990's. But even under USSR rule the Czech folks were faithful to Catholicism. There are several places with interesting shrines and churches we found in our time in The Czech Republic.

Our first visit was to the Velehrad Monastery which was first built in the 1200s and then re-built in the 1600's after a fire destroyed the original monastery. The main attraction there was the Basilica of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and Saints Cyril and Methodius. Each year there is a national pilgrimage which draws thousands to the Basilica. In 1990, Pope John Paul II made a visit there and later a second visit.

We learned more about Sts. Cyril and Methodius, while we were at the monastery. St. Cyril (826-869) was named Constantine at birth and St. Methodius (815-885) was named Michael at birth. The brothers, Christian theologians in the Byzantine era, were missionaries. Due to their efforts in converting the Slavic people, they were known as the Apostles to the Slavs.

Prior to going to the Slavic people, Cyril was a University Professor and also a priest while Methodius remained a deacon for some time. And Methodius had a significant role in Byzantine politics and Administration while still serving as an Abbot in his monastery.

In 862, Prince Rastislav of Great Moravia requested missionaries be sent to the Great Kingdom of Moravia to convert his Slavic subjects. The Prince noted that his subjects had already rejected paganism and were following Christian law. Apparently, Roman Catholic missionaries had already been evangelizing the Slavs, but probably for political reasons, the Prince had expelled those missionaries and were now asking for some missionaries from Constantinople. The Byzantine Emperor was delighted to fulfill that request and sent Cyril and his brother since it would extend the Byzantine power. In 863, the brothers began translating the Gospels and essential liturgical books into what is now known as Old Church Slavonic. Then the brothers traveled to Great Moravia to share their efforts. But the German church leaders opposed their efforts to create a Slavic liturgy. The brothers devised the Glagolitic script which was the first alphabet for Slavonic manuscripts. Later revisions led to the Cyrillic alphabet which is still in use. The two brothers also developed the first Slavic Civil Code for Great Moravia. Derivatives the Old Church Slavonic is still used in the liturgy by several Orthodox Churches, and also in some Eastern Catholic churches.

In their missionary work in Moravia, Cyril and Methodius encountered other missionaries from East Francia who represented the Roman branch of the church who insisted that Latin be used in Liturgies. Because of these differences, Cyril and Methodius went to Rome to see the Pope to find a solution. In 867 when friction developed, the brothers, unwilling to be a cause of dissension among Christians, decided to travel to Rome to see the Pope to seek a solution. The brothers brought relics of St. Clement with them and were accompanied by some of their disciples. They arrived in Rome in 868 to receive a warm welcome from Pope Adrian (867-872). Pope Adrian formally authorized the use of the new Slavic liturgy.

Methodius was also ordained as a priest in Rome by the Pope and five of their disciples were ordained as priest or deacons. These five individuals (Saint Gorazd, Saint Clement of Ohrid, Saint Naum, Saint Angelar, and Saint Sava), plus Sts. Cyril and St. Methodius are venerated by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as the "Seven Saints". While they were still in Rome, Cyril died.

Methodius was named the Archbishop of Sirmium, a place in what is now Serbia, with authority over all of Moravia and Pannonia. He also received authority to use the Slavonic Liturgy in his jurisdiction. He returned to the Slavic people to continue his missionary work in Pannonia which included parts of the current Hungary, Austria, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. He did not return to Moravia because of a new ruler there wanted to dispose Methodius because he was seen as a threat to the rights of Salzburg. After some time, Methodius was captured and forced to answer to the east Frankish Bishops. They declared him disposed and sent Methodius to Germany where he was kept prisoner for 2.5 years in a monastery.

Rome intervened. A new Pope, John VIII (872-882) secured the release of Methodius but told him to stop using the Slavonic Liturgy. Methodius was re-installed as the Archbishop over Greater Moravia

and Pannonia. While his authority was restricted in Moravia which was being ruled by German Nobles, he was able to work in Pannonia undisturbed.



Sts. Methodius and Cyril, painted by Zahari Zograf (Захарий Христович Димитров), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

But apparently , Methodius continued to use the Slavonic Liturgy which again created problems for him with the Frankish Clerics who brought charges against him in Rome. In 878 he was called to Rome again to answer charges of heresy and using the Slavonic liturgy. This time Methodius was able to convince the Pope to let him to continue to use the Slavonic liturgy. But then Pope John's successor adopted a Latin only policy that lasted for years. Methodius had no choice but to accept this order.

Methodius died in 885. He was buried in the main cathedral church of Great Moravia. However, since there is confusion about which city was the capital of Great Moravia, no one knows for sure which cathedral holds his coffin.

Then we proceeded to explore the Velehrad Monastery. This is a large Cistercian Monastery in the southeast portion of the Czech Republic. As you can see in the images below it is very beautiful.



Cibtom at Czech Wikipedia, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, left. Bjalek Michal, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right. Basilica

Stanislav Ferzik, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left. Courtyard
Jiri Zeman, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons, panoramic view, below right.
Palickap, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, below, center: Chapel of the Mother of Christian Unity



The Cistercian Monastery was founded by the ruler of Moravia along with the Bishop of Olomouc in 1205 but the complex built in Romanesque style was not completed until the mid-1200's. It continued as a Monastery until 1784 when Emperor Joseph II abolished it by a decree. The people who worked there founded a municipality in the monastery complex.

Over the centuries, the buildings became dilapidated. In the 1800's restoration slowly began but in the Baroque style rather than the original style of Romanesque. Since 1890, the monastery has been managed by the Jesuits. It has become an important pilgrimage site since then with large numbers of pilgrims visiting annually. It is considered the most important pilgrimage site in Moravia.

Due to its location, Velehrad commemorates the evangelism of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and their work that led to the beginning of Slavic literature and culture. It was the center of meeting of Eastern and Western Christianity when the Unionist Congresses began laying the ground for today's ecumenism. And in 1985, Velehrad became a place to fight for the human right for religious freedom through a National pilgrimage. Pope John Paul II declared Sts. Cyril and Methodius as the common patrons of

Europe in 1980 and then chose this Monastery as his first stop to a former Iron Curtain country after the collapse of the USSR.

We started our visit to the monastery at the Basilica of the Assumption of Mary and Saints Cyril and Methodius, which is protected as a national cultural monument. In the pictures above there is a large cross commemorating the 1990 visit of Pope John Paul II. We spent time here in quiet prayer. Then we continued exploring the Monastery where we found a grammar school, a facility for caring for the ill, and the covered walkway between buildings known as a Salla Terrena, which had a ceiling painted in Baroque frescoes, such as the one below.



Palickap, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Other monuments and sights in Velehrad include the house of Saints Cyril and Methodius which now serves as an information center, a museum in a former farm building, the Velehrad cemetery, a Rosary Pilgrimage Route with Stations of the Cross, and many statues of saints and other small religious monuments. In front of the basilica there is the big cross that reminds us of the visit of the pope John Paul II in 1990. A Baroque Marian Column, Sculptures of St. Bernard, St. Luitgarda, and Jan Nepomuk are nearby.

After completing a tour of these monuments, we followed the Rosary Pilgrimage Route pausing at each of the twenty stations of the cross to pray. This route connects the Monastery to the nearby town of Staré Město which is the location of the Great Moravia Monument. This town is what remains of one of the capitals of Great Moravia, known as Velinhrad. The Great Moravian Monument was built over the foundation of the first building discovered in Moravia, a church with the name of Na Valách. The



monument is a museum today depicting the Great Moravia Empire as it was in the 9th century.

There are two churches in the town, St. Michael the Archangel was built in the early 1200's and its core contained the remnants of a Great Moravia rotunda. The Church of the Holy Spirit was built in 2002. In the front of the picture, you can see the graves and monuments of the deceased villagers. There was also Kovozoo, a strange zoo comprised of a number of metal animals and

other sculptures.

palickap, CC BY 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons , left Petr.adamek, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right

From Stare Mesto we headed to Brno to see the Cathedral of Sts Peter and Paul (Czech: Katedrála svatého Petra a Pavla). The interior is shown at below left.

The Cathedral is located on a hill called Petrov and the citizens of Brno often refer to the Cathedral as Petrov. The cathedral serves the Diocese of Brno. It is a national cultural monument and is considered one of the important pieces of architecture in South Moravia. It is a national cultural monument and is considered one of the important pieces of architecture in South Moravia.





Kirk, CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

The outside of the church is the Gothic style of the 14th century while the interior has been updated in Baroque style. It has two 275 feet tall towers added in the early 1900s.

A church has been at this site since the 11th or early 12th centuries. It is known that a Romanesque Chapel was at this site at 1140. A larger church was built here about 1230 dedicated to St. Peter but that was damaged in a fire that burned in the city in 1306. The next church was dedicated to Sts. Peter and Paul in 1378. Other additions and renovation were ongoing. After

renovations in the 18th century, it was given the status of a Cathedral. As with any older build, renovations were periodically completed with the last major change being the addition of the two towers mentioned before.



Palickap, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons , altar left and wall decorations right.

The main altar, left, is by August Prokop and Karl Woresch from 1891. The church bells are rung daily at 11:00am, rather than at noon as is most common. This began during the Thirty Years' War when the invading troops said they would



stop attacking the city if they couldn't succeed in taking city by August 15th at noon. Some crafty inhabitants decided to ring the bells an hour early, fooling the invaders to stop the siege and leave empty-handed. And thus began the tradition of the bells at 11:00 am!

From Brno we headed north and slightly west to find the Pilgrimage Church of Saint John of Nepomuk (Czech: Poutní kostel svatého Jana Nepomuckého) at the edge of Žďár nad Sázavou. This is near the old historical border of Moravia and Bohemia.



Prazak, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left

The building of the pilgrimage Church of St. John of Nepomuk near the monastery in Žďár is considered to be a direct reaction of the abbot of that monastery to the discovery of preserved tissue in the tomb of John of Nepomuk in the St. Vitus Cathedral in April of 1719. Santini Aichel was selected to be the architect who incorporated the abbot's idea that the church should have a star shape into an impressive design. It was consecrated immediately after St. John's beatification in 1720, but the work was not completed until 1727. It was named a World Heritage Site in 1994.

The central church has an adjacent cloister which suggests star shape, in circular format. The star was chosen because according to legend, when St. John died, five stars appeared above his body.



Gampe, CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons, dome of the church, left and altar below center.
 Wolkenkratzer, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right, Aerial view of the complex.



the church as seen in the image
 five chapels and five gates. Pilgrims can use this area to shelter in during bad weather.

Who was John of Nepomuk (c. 1345 – 20 March 1393)? He was Bohemian priest and saint who was executed by King Wenceslaus IV of Bohemia for disobedience. John was thrown into the Vltava river to drown. The story that he executed for refusing to report what the Queen shared in the confessional to the King was a later invention in around the mid-1400's. But the tale resulted in John being considered the martyr of the Seal of the Confessional.

In 1393, John was made vicar-general of Saint Giles Cathedral by Jan of Jenštejn, Archbishop of Prague, who reported to Pope Boniface IX in Rome. This was at the time when there was divisiveness in the church with Antipope Clement VII in Avignon who was supported by King Wenceslaus IV. The King was feuding with Archbishop Jenštejn over revenues of a Benedictine Abbey. The king had the Archbishop and his subordinates were arrested, but the Archbishop escaped. The four subordinates, including John, were tortured and only John remained loyal to the Archbishop. On March 20, 1393, the King had John



executed. Documentation of his life makes it clear he was most likely dead from the torture before he was disposed of in the river. His body was recovered three days later and taken to a nearby church until the King left for his country estate. At that time, John was buried in St. Vitus Cathedral, a direct affront to the King. The Church officially recognized the falsity of the legend in 1961 with the change recorded to reflect that he was punished and tortured before being thrown into the river.

The image at left is the statute of John of Nepomuk which sits on the Charles Bridge in Prague. It is approximately at the site where he was drowned in Vltava.

Ludek, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Then we headed to Prague but we ended the week just before reaching that city.

Thanks for participating!
 Your Tour Director
 Kathy Scharer