

### **History of the Prayer Vigil Faithful at St. Casimir**

Despite its historic significance and importance to the Polish Community, St. Casimir was ordered closed by Bishop Lennon along with 56 other churches (and one other parish) in the Cleveland Diocese. The last Mass as many believed, at the time, took place on November 8, 2009 with Bishop Lennon presiding.

An important event occurred just before closing in that a Polish Priest (Father Wachala) came to St. Casimir, and dedicated the church to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Those that believe in the “Miracle of St. Casimir” believe this was an important event.

The Sunday after the Bishop closed St. Casimir, parishioners began their vigil. They braved winter's winds and snow, and the summer's heat and rain. Prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary were held in both the Polish and English language outside the locked doors of the church. This group and members of the St. Casimir Alumni appealed to the Vatican for help. A formal appeal was accepted by Rome, along with 10 other parishes in Cleveland.

### **Start of the Prayer Vigils**

Dr. Michael Klymiuk-Wieczerski, a parishioner at St. Casimir called fellow members about a dream that he had the night after the church was closed. He said the Virgin Mary appeared in his dream and said, "Don't leave me", which he took to mean the church. This event led to the assembly of many faithful from not only St. Casimir, but visitors from even other states to form a prayer vigil each and every Sunday in the rain, snow, and cold led by Mr. Joe Feckanin, Stan Zadnik, and Wojtek Fleszar. Soon other closed churches under appeal began their own prayer vigils at St. Patrick, St. Wendelin, St. Emeric, and St. James. Letters poured into Rome, and the Bishop's office; articles appeared in publications across the world including the *Los Angeles Times*, New York radio host Rita Cosby hosted Mr. Feckanin, and many wondered why and how this tiny group of Poles were so dedicated to this cause.

Aside from the criticism, the vigils went on at St. Casimir outside the closed gates. The group's motto that gave each of them strength was, and still is, "NIE BOJCIE SIE" (in English: "DO NOT BE AFRAID"). Pope John Paul II on his first visit to Poland as the Vicar of Christ quoted these words. These same words ignited a nation to throw off the chains of tyranny.

In May 2010, St. Casimir vigil organizers met with Endangered Catholics supporters to conduct a public event on the steps of the Cleveland City Hall. City Council members came, and spoke, to show their support for the closed churches. In January, 2012, another massive letter writing campaign was mounted by the faithful; but this time targeting Cardinals and the Pope himself in Rome. Signatures were gathered from the Cleveland Community and sent to Rome urging the churches to be reopened.

After two and an half years on the streets, supporters continued their tireless efforts but certainly many grew weary. On a warm evening on March 7, 2012 on the week of the feast day of St. Casimir, a formal announcement went across the news channels in Cleveland— “Cleveland Churches to reopen!!” A decree was issued from the Vatican which listed the names of parishioners declaring the closing of St. Casimir, as invalid and calling for its reopening was made public that day. Members of the prayer vigils from churches slated to reopen came down to

St. Casimir's to rejoice in the streets on that evening. Monika Socheka's mother, Helene, ill from cancer came to celebrate with us. Please remember Helene as she passed away a few days later, but at least found rest with the "joyous news."

On July 15, the church and neighborhood was full of cars and people from across the city and state. Over 1200 people came to see what many now feel is why Dr. Klymiuk stated "the miracle has happened."

\*Please note that only a few of the names appear in this history. Many of the faithful that contributed so much are not listed above. A photo with names of the prayer vigil faithful is now available.