

150th Anniversary of Father Leon Rogalski's Arrival in Hill River

Solemn Mass on this occasion

In 1870, Father Leon Rogalski, a Polish Jesuit from Galicia, arrived in Hill River, which later received the nickname "Polish Hill River." He quickly won the hearts of his fellow countrymen. Together, they completed the construction of a small stone church, which was consecrated a year later under the patronage of St. Stanislaus Kostka.

Father Leon Rogalski not only celebrated masses but also taught Latin, French, and religion in English at the school in Sevenhill. His life story was described by Father Andrzej Bieś in a book titled *Leon Rogalski SJ: Pastor of Polish Immigrants*, in which he recounted the Polish priest's life and work in South Australia, as well as the experiences of the first Polish settlers – based on Father Leon's letters, where he shared his observations on the subject. The book is available in two language versions – Polish and English.

In 2020, the 150th anniversary of Father Leon Rogalski's arrival in Hill River was commemorated. On this occasion, Father Wiesław Słowik from Melbourne initiated a ceremony in Polish Hill River. The pandemic disrupted these plans. However, the organizers did not give up, and the celebration was held a year later.

In brief

On Saturday, March 13, 2021, a solemn thanksgiving mass was celebrated in honor of the service of the first Polish priest in Australia. The celebrations began with the Stations of the Cross, led by Fr. Michał Skiba, a member of the Society of Christ and head of the Polish Pastoral Center in Adelaide, who also wrote the reflections. The Stations of the Cross were placed around the historic church.

The solemn mass was preceded by official speeches.

The attendees were welcomed by Edward Dudziński, president of the Federation of Polish Organizations in South Australia and a member of the Polish Hill River Church Museum Committee. On this occasion, Edward Dudziński also reminded everyone that this year marks the 45th anniversary of the first pilgrimage of Poles to the restored Polish Hill River site.

The first to congratulate the event on behalf of Queen Elizabeth was His Excellency Hieu Van Le, Governor of South Australia.

Following him were speeches by: Michał Kołodziejcki – Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Australia, Archbishop Patrick O'Regan, Father Quyen Vu – Provincial of the Jesuit Society in Australia, and Małgorzata Kwiatkowska – President of the Council of Polish Organizations in Australia.

Father Quyen Vu presented a copy of the painting of St. Stanislaus Kostka to the church in PHR. The original painting was brought to Hill River by Father Rogalski and later transferred to the Jesuit church in Sevenhill.

Małgorzata Kwiatkowska presented Father Wiesław Słowik with a medal from the Supreme Council of Polish Organizations in Australia in gratitude for his 50 years of service among the Polish community.

The solemn Mass was co-celebrated by the retired bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie, Gregory O'Kelly SJ, Archbishop Patrick O'Regan, Bishop Karol Kulczycki SDS (current Bishop of Port Pirie), and 13 priests, including clergy from Adelaide: Fr. Marian Szablewski, Fr. Michał Skiba, and Fr. Wiesław Pawłowski.

In his homily, Bishop Gregory O'Kelly presented the life and pastoral work of Father Rogalski.

At the end, Bishop Karol Kulczycki spoke in our native language. After the Mass, there was time for lunch prepared by volunteers from Salisbury – bigos and sausages, a typical Polish meal.

The religious celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Father Leon Rogalski's arrival in PHR concluded with the Bitter Lamentations.

The service was led by Father Wiesław Słowik.