

## A Saint in the Strip: St. Stanislaus Kostka

By Alyson N. Clover

Amidst the businesses and commercial buildings of Pittsburgh's Strip District is one of the city's greatest examples of European-influenced religious architecture. The ornate facade of St. Stanislaus Kostka Roman Catholic Church evokes grandiose medieval churches as it holds court over the long rows of warehouses, shop windows, and vacant buildings that line 21st and Smallman streets.

St. Stanislaus Kostka was the first Polish Catholic church built in Pittsburgh. The parish was established in 1875 after Polish members of local German and Eastern European parishes formed the St. Stanislaus Beneficial Society in 1873.<sup>1</sup> The society used a former Presbyterian church until 1891, when it purchased the land on which the current church stands. The building was completed in 1892, designed by Pittsburgh architect Frederick C. Sauer (1860-1942). Sauer strictly followed the desires of Father Anthony Jawroski, CSSp., ultimately creating a home and religious center for the city's Polish community.

St. Stanislaus is Romanesque in style, constructed of red brick and accentuated with prominent stone ornamentation. The attention to detail and the intricacy of the design in both the brick and stonework are astounding, as are the stained glass windows. The stained glass figure windows were produced at the Royal Bavarian Art Institute in Munich, and are considered some of the best examples in existence.

St. Stanislaus's interior is Baroque, featuring three open aisles and a lofty barrel-vaulted ceiling. The altar is surrounded by a frame of paintings, a large crucifix, colored columns, and a golden crown canopy. The paintings, unlike the stained glass, are not

Photo by Brian Butko.



original: they were added by artist Vincent Scatena in 1925 for the parish's Golden Jubilee. They combine religious images with representations of Polish culture and history.

The parish has many connections with prominent religious groups and figures such as the Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo and the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, including Mother Frances Siedliska, who was later beatified. St. Stanislaus even has its own connection to the Vatican; in 1969, the late Pope John Paul II, then still a Cardinal, paid an unannounced visit to the church. Cardinal Wotija was struck by the church's beauty, and commented on how it reminded him of those in Poland.

Visitors to the History Center's upcoming exhibition, *Vatican Splendors: A Journey Through Faith and Art*, as well as any fan of religious art and architecture, should

take the time to visit this church. St. Stanislaus offers a visual and spiritual reprieve from the bustle of everyday life, and is a reminder of Pittsburgh's diverse past and its connection to the Catholic community. ✨

**Alyson Clover** is a student in Duquesne University's Archival, Museum, and Editing program. Visit [www.saintsinthestrip.org](http://www.saintsinthestrip.org) for more information on St. Stanislaus Kostka Church.

<sup>1</sup> St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish. *A Year of Jubilee: The Centennial of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, 1892-1992*. 1992.

In celebration of *Vatican Splendors*, on Saturday, October 2, a short prayer service will be held at St. Stanislaus at 8:00 a.m. followed by a procession to the History Center. Smallman Street will be closed from 12th to 21st streets between 8:00 – 9:30 a.m.