



# Chairman's Column

By: Aloys Notzon, PHC Chairman and President

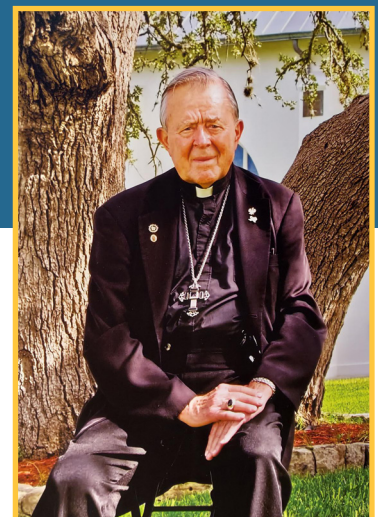
At this time of the year, Bishop Yanta's birthday, his death and the opening of his final project, the Polish Heritage Center, bring back so many memories. This year we began by celebrating the third anniversary of his death with a Mass at the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Panna Maria.

Fr. Ricardo Ramirez was the principal celebrant and was there to honor Bishop Yanta since he is pastor of St. James Church in San Antonio, where Bishop Yanta had served as pastor; concelebrating was Fr. Wieslaw Iwaniec, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church. Following Mass, the family and friends of Bishop Yanta held a graveside prayer service and then went to a reception at the Polish Heritage Center where Bishop Yanta was toasted and the attendees shared stories and remembrances.

Bishop Yanta envisioned, organized, directed, recruited a Board, fund raised and was the largest individual donor as well as the Chairman and President of the Center as well as the CEO for 8 years. It stands as his tribute to and his appreciation of all those who supported his effort to always remember our hard-working immigrant ancestors.

A great crowd of Bishop Yanta fans turned out for his celebration of life with the Lord. It was so much fun sharing Bishop Yanta stories about his impact on people's spirituality, his generosity, his courage and his charisma.

Following his birthday on Oct. 2, we will be celebrating the opening of the Bishop Yanta Exhibit in the Center on Oct. 18. This exhibit will provide other opportunities for visitors to see the details of his achievements and his life story. We look forward to welcoming each of you to visit and leave your own Father/Bishop John Yanta story.



# | Preparing for the Bishop's Exhibit

By: Alice Poore, PHC Executive Director

August 5th was bittersweet for the PHC staff and me. We took down the Polish Texas Veterans Memorial Exhibit, one that our visitors greatly enjoyed as a beautiful, visual tribute to those who served in so many wars. After months of collecting, planning and designing by Lauren Robinson, the PHC's Archivist, we are extremely proud to say that hundreds of students and visitors were mesmerized by the collection that was on display for nine months. Thank you to all the families and friends for your contributions in helping us tell this important story.

With that ending comes a wonderful sense of excitement for the PHC's new exhibit celebrating the life of our beloved visionary, Bishop John W. Yanta. Many have been involved in this project for over two years. Bishop Yanta was an avid collector of religious and historical books, memorabilia from his travels, hundreds of photographs of family, friends, and his many adventures, along with his beautiful collection of vestments worn during his years as a priest and Bishop. Lauren has been researching, collecting, categorizing, and labeling these items from Bishop's extensive collections. With help from the Collections Committee - Al Notzon, Sam Kotara, Susie Kotara, Susan Moczygamba- McKinsey, and myself - difficult decisions were made to narrow down what would be displayed.

Bishop Yanta's dear friend Steve Harding, the original exhibit designer of the Polish Heritage Center, came aboard early in the planning. Steve introduced us to Clay McClure, a professor at Schreiner University, who teaches Visual and Performing Arts classes. Clay has served as the primary exhibit designer. Will Fuller and his team from Acacia Originals have collaborated and worked tirelessly to construct the designs submitted by Clay. Installation of these structures and designs will begin in September.

Al Notzon, Susan Moczygamba-McKinsey, and Lauren Robinson have been writing and rewriting text that will tell Bishop's story. Art Inc. and Digital ProLab from San Antonio will print, frame, and display all the storylines and photos that have been selected for the exhibit.

Ken Kosub, a video design consultant responsible for the documentary and other beautiful stories in the Center, will assemble a collection of testimonials given by Bishop's friends and colleagues. Visitors will have the opportunity to hear these stories, anecdotes, and special moments. Hours have gone into the production of our newest exhibit and we expect hundreds of visitors to view this spectacular tribute to Bishop.

The exhibit, Celebrating the Life of Bishop John W. Yanta, will open on Saturday, October 18. Mass will be held at the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church in Panna Maria at 10:30 a.m. The exhibit opening and reception are scheduled for 11:30 a.m. Everyone is invited to attend. More information will be provided on the PHC website and Facebook.



# | Welcome New PHC Staff



**Christina Griffith**  
Assistant to the Executive Director



**Harley Garcia**  
Director of Computer  
Applications and Technology



**Rebekah Pawelek**  
Director of Marketing

# A Remarkable Meeting: George Kowalik Reunites with Relatives in Poland

By: Wiktor Wojsyk, Polish Musician and Friend of George

At the beginning of August, George Kowalik from Panna Maria visited Poland – the country from which his great-great-grandfather, Melchior Kowolik, departed 170 years ago. For George, this was his sixth journey to the land of his ancestors. He first came here thirteen years ago, and ever since, he has called each visit a “Kowalik hunt” – an attempt to find traces of his Polish family.

## From Kowolik to Kowalik

The family name in Poland was originally Kowolik. Only after emigrating to America was it changed to Kowalik, which is crucial to this story. Over the years, George managed to meet people with this surname, but these were brief encounters, without deeper awareness of the history carried by the great wave of immigration to Texas from what is now the region of upper Silesia in Poland in the mid-19th century, initiated by Father Leopold Moczygemba.

## In Zębowice and Kadłub Wolny

A similar scenario was expected this time as well. George, together with his daughter Dana and son-in-law Terry, visited the parish church in Zębowice, where his ancestors once prayed. There he met his friends – musicians Wiktor and Jakub Wojsyk – whom he had previously hosted in Panna Maria during their performances in March 2025. Together they visited the cemetery, where the name Kowolik appeared frequently on headstones. The group then traveled to the village of Kadłub



Wolny, which George knew was the birthplace of his ancestor Melchior. The mere presence of the Americans immediately sparked the interest of the villagers. The village head, Krzysztof Pipa, when asked about Kowolik households, did not hesitate – he got into his car and directed them to a farm that came to mind. There George met Robert Kowolik, a young farmer who – though surprised – warmly welcomed the guests and showed them around his farm. Afterwards, they were invited to the local museum – the village memory chamber of Kadłub Wolny. It seemed that another “Kowalik hunt” would end there. But fate had something extraordinary in store.

## Excitement in Kadłub Wolny

When Robert Kowolik told his family about the unusual guest from Texas, Kadłub Wolny buzzed with excitement. The very next morning, starting at 6 a.m., the phones began ringing – everyone wanted to meet their “uncle from America.”

It turned out that in the village had lived Georg Kowolik, who knew very well the story of the three brothers: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar – one of whom, Melchior, emigrated to Texas in the mid-19th century. For years, he shared this knowledge with his family. Sadly, Georg passed away in 2023 and did not live to meet his Texan relative. Interestingly, during an earlier visit in 2012, George had visited Georg’s home, but at the time the host was at work, so the cousins never met.



## A Family Reunion after 170 Years

The culmination of this remarkable story was the first true family reunion, held on Monday, August 11, in Kadłub Wolny. In a courtyard decorated with the flags of the USA, Texas, Poland, and Silesia, George was welcomed by twelve Kowoliks – descendants of Caspar and Balthazar, the brothers of his ancestor Melchior.

The family came prepared – each brought photo albums, documents, and memories to share their history. The evening was filled with joy, emotion, and conversations about both Polish and American ancestors. The Kowoliks emphasized that the memory of Melchior had never been lost – his name had appeared in every generation.

## A Symbolic Moment

The Polish family wanted George to experience the history of his ancestors as vividly as possible. They took him to the oldest family homestead, where Melchior Kowolik had grown up before leaving for Texas. It was an incredibly moving moment – after 170 years, the emigrant’s descendant stood on the very ground from which his forefather had departed overseas. Overcome with emotion, George took a shovel, dug up a handful of soil, and carried it with him to America.

The reunion in Kadłub Wolny will surely go down in the family’s history. George Kowalik returned to Texas enriched with the family he had rediscovered after 170 years. Meanwhile, the Polish Kowoliks discovered a living bond with their cousin across the ocean and hope this story will continue with future gatherings.



**THE  
POLISH HERITAGE CENTER  
AT PANNA MARIA**

13909 N FM 81  
PO Box 25  
Panna Maria, Texas 78144



PHC Hours: Tues. – Sat. 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
[www.polishheritagecentertx.org](http://www.polishheritagecentertx.org)  
(830) 310-8612

The Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria  
Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax deductible organization.

TAX ID: #46-0561240

**News from the Heritage Communities**

**October Festivals and Events**

- Oct. 12** Panna Maria Homecoming and Turkey Dinner
- Oct. 18** Opening of Bishop Yanta Exhibit at the PHC
- Oct. 19** Cestohowa Turkey Dinner
- Oct. 25** Jubilee Assembly 2025 in Panna Maria  
“Day of Prayer, Fasting and Reconciliation”