**NEW SCANDINAVIA LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**OCTOBER NEWSLETTER 2025**



**October 12th New Scandinavia Lutheran Church** - **150th Anniversary**

**Sunday School at 10 am Worship Service at 11 am**

**Dinner and Fellowship around Noon**.  **Wear your 150th T-Shirts!!!!!!**

“At this time, when we need so much strength to regain and uphold our freedom, let us pray to God to fill us with the power of His Spirit, to reawaken the sprit of true solidarity in our hearts.”

The end of the communist era in eastern Europe began in June 1979 when John Paul II, the newly elected Polish pope, returned to his homeland for the first of three visits. As the communist authorities stood helplessly by, millions of Poles provided the pontiff with an ecstatic welcome. His message was ostensibly spiritual, but in official atheistic Poland the spiritual inevitably carre3d the weight of social criticism. There was no escaping the import of the pope’s message when he proclaimed, “Do not be afraid to insist on your rights. Refuse a life based on lies and double thinking. Do not be afraid to suffer with Christ.” Within a year of his visit the militant Solidarity trade union movement was born.

At the same time of the pope’s visit Father Jerzy Popieluszko was living in Warsaw and working as a chaplain to the university medical students. Born in 1947to a peasant family, he belonged to the generation that had grown up under communism. But while he shared with most Poles a distain for the communist system, he had never before taken an active part in political discussion. His role in the Solidarity movement came about mostly by accident. When the Gdansk ship workers went on strike in August 1980, steelworkers in Warsaw joined them in solidarity. They sent a request to the chancery for a priest to come and celebrate Mass at the factory. Father Jerzy, who happened to be on hand at the time, volunteered.

The Mass in front of the factory, where the workers had erected an enormous cross, was an extraordinary turning point in the young priest’s life. At once he realized that the workers’ struggle for justice and freedom was truly a spiritual struggle. It was entirely appropriate and vital that the church bear witness in the midst of this struggle. And so, with his bishop’s consent, he became a chaplain to the striking workers.

In December 1981 the government declared martial law, and thousands of Solidarity members and their supporters were arrested. At this point Father Jerzy’s pastoral duties expanded to include visiting the prisoners and organizing support for their families. At the same time, through his “patriotic sermons,” which drew enormous crowds, he underlined the moral and spiritual dimensions of the Solidarity cause. It was a struggle for freedom and independence against foreign-imposed totalitarianism. But it was also a struggle to affirm the spiritual nature of the human person and to reject a culture built on hatred, lies, and fear.

Though the government claimed that this was no business for the church, Father Jerzy proclaimed, “It is not only the hierarchy but the millions of believers who in the broadest sense embody the church. So when people suffer and are persecuted the church also feels the pain. The mission of the church is to be with the people and to share in their joys and sorrows.” As for his own vocation, he said “To service God is to seek a way to human hearts. To serve God is to speak about evil as a sickness which should be brought to light so that it can be cured. To serve God is to condemn evil in all its manifestations.”

As his popularity grew, the government sought ways to silence him. He was subjected to countless forms of petty harassment. He was followed wherever he went. His Masses were often interrupted by provocateurs. In the most ominous attack, a bomb was hurled against his apartment. Still, he refused to be paralyzed by fear: “The only thing we should fear is the betrayal of Christ for a few silver pieces of meaningless peace.”

In 1984 the pressures increased. Between January and June he was brought in for interrogation thirteen times. In July he was indicted on the charge of “abusing freedom of conscience and religion to the detriment of the Polish People Republic.” The charge provoked a storm of protest, and he was quickly offered an amnesty in honor of the fortieth anniversary of communist Poland. The workers themselves, fearful for his safety, requested that the cardinal send him abroad for study. But Father Jerzy would not consider any appearance of abandoning the workers in their time of need. He understood the risks but insisted that “if we must die it is better to meet death while defending a worthwhile cause than sitting back and letting an injustice take place… The priest is called to bear witness to the truth, to suffer for the truth, and if needed be to give up his life for it. We have many such examples in Christianity. From them we should draw conclusions for ourselves.”

On the night of October 19, Father Jerzy was abducted by three men who stuffed him in the trunk of their car and sped off. His driver managed to escape and report the incident. Masses were said throughout the country for the priest’s safe deliverance. But it was already too late. The government, facing a propaganda debacle, launched an immediate investigation and subsequently arrested four members of the security police who led them to the priest’s body. They confessed that in the early morning hours of October 20, after savagely and repeatedly beathing Father Jerzy, they had tied him up, weighed his body with stones, and tossed him, still alive, into a reservoir. Those who killed Father Jerzy had wished to still his voice. But it only reverberated the louder.

It was clearly heard five years later when, in the first free elections in postwar Poland, the people peacefully threw out the communist regime and elected a Solidarity government.

Gracious and holy God, lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

Pastor Sara