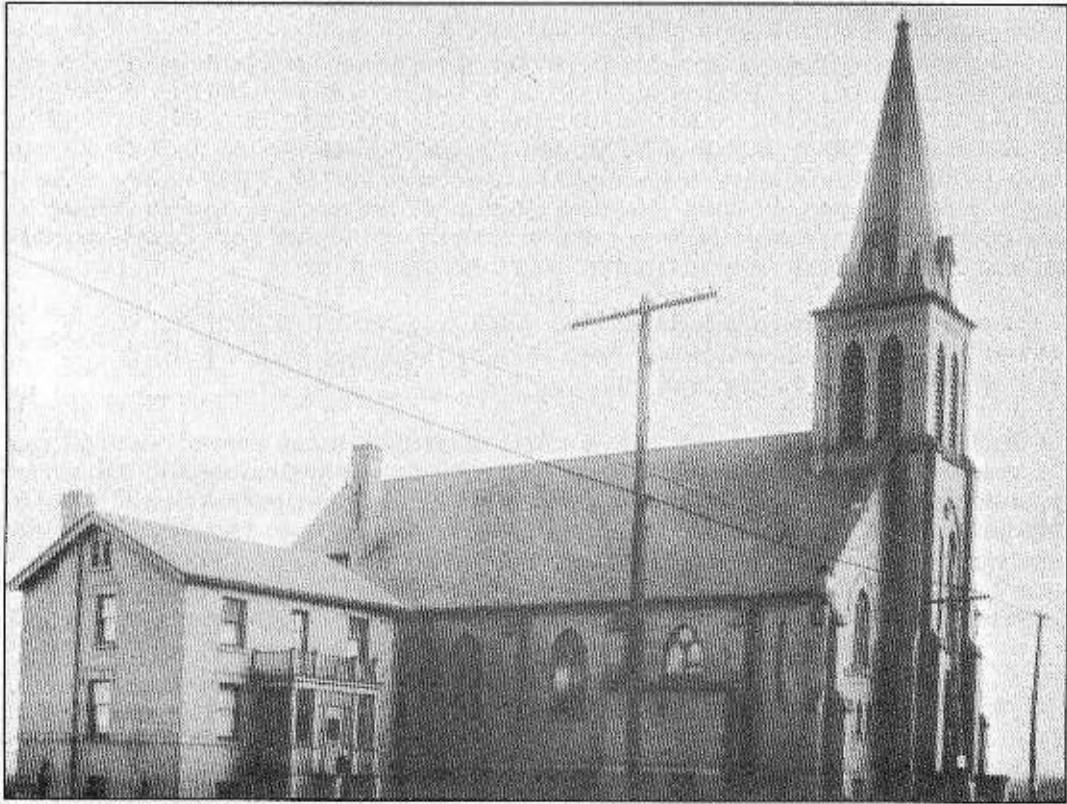

**History
of
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
and
Our Lady of Bistrica Church**



1920

1917 to 1992

The Croatian community petitioned His Excellency Most Reverend Dennis J. Dougherty, Bishop of Buffalo in 1916 to build a Croatian church in Lackawanna. Members of the "Zora Krajsnik" fraternal organization raised the interest for the Croatian church and parish at a meeting held on Simon Avenue. On January 8, 1917 Bishop Dougherty consented to their petitions and appointed Reverend Father Leon Josip Medic, O.F.M., a Croatian Franciscan from Chicago, Illinois, to come to Lackawanna, New York. Father Medic was originally from Dubrovnik, Croatia. Holy masses were celebrated at St. Hyacinth's Polish Roman Catholic church.

Father Medic, with the original pioneers Philip Pericak, Grga Mekic, Antun Ribarich and Paul Empric, formed a committee and on March 19, 1917 bought property for the church for the sum of \$8,400.00 at 108 Ridge Road, near Simon and Gates Avenue. On May 20, 1917, a small wooden structure was dedicated in honor of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The holy ambition of Father Medic and his parishioners was to replace the small wooden church with a larger, brick structure. On September 6, 1920, a new, beautiful church was dedicated by Most Reverend Bishop of Buffalo, H.E. Turner, assisted by Monsignor Nelson H. Baker, known as "Padre of the Poor." Father Baker had blessed the first wooden church and also the cornerstone for the new church.

Several priests served the parish: Rev. Leon Josip Medic, O.F.M., first Pastor, from 1917 to 1923; Rev. Bohumil Badura from 1923 to 1939; Rev. Earl J. Kleis from 1939 to 1945; Rev. Thomas E. Fernan from 1945 to 1949.

Msgr. Stephen F. Lackovic, S.T.D., a native of Marija Bistrica, Croatia, was appointed to serve in the parish as an assistant to Father Fernan from October 24, 1948. Msgr. Lackovic was named the parish's administrator on February 10, 1949 and remained as the administrator until his retirement December 8, 1981. Under Msgr. Lackovic's leadership, the mortgage of the old church was burned on October 15, 1950.

After sixty years at 108 Ridge Road, a building committee was formed to select a new site for an auditorium and church. The Cardinal Stepinac Auditorium was built at the corner of Abbott Road and West Elmview and was dedicated on Sunday, October 29, 1961, the feast of Christ the King. The auditorium served the parishioners and community as a mission for holy masses on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation until the new church was completed in 1976. The new church, renamed "Our Lady of Bistrica Croatian Church," was blessed and dedicated by the Most Reverend Edward D. Head, Bishop of Buffalo, on Sunday June 13, 1976, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity.

Rev. Christopher Coric, O.F.M., Conv., was appointed assistant to Msgr. Lackovic on October 4, 1977 and became Pastor of Our Lady of Bistrica Church December 8, 1981. The mortgage of the new church was burned November 7, 1982. Bells from the old church on Ridge Road were saved and installed in a bell tower in 1984 and are located in front of the church. A gazebo and pavillion were built and paid for in 1990.

The parishioners and community are to be congratulated for the many accomplishments in this parish since 1917.
