



father patejko

zeeland priest, kin to reunite

ZEELAND—For a man who hasn't seen his father or sister for 15 years, the Rev. Gregory Patejko is a very jovial man.

He likes to joke and kid, and the cheeks of his rounded face shake when he breaks into his typically boistrous laugh. He's well liked around the Zeeland area, even though he's a native of a bigger city — Warsaw, Poland.

It was in 1968, after Patejko (pronounced puh-ta-go) had become a Roman Catholic priest, that he left his homeland because he disagreed with its government and was granted political asylum in Austria.

When he departed Poland, Patejko also left his father and sister behind. "When I left, they didn't even know," he said with a heavy Slavic accent. "They heard from radio. I didn't want to tell them because they might have trouble with the Polish authorities."

Now however, Patejko has more reason than ever to be happy and jovial. Those Polish authorities who he was afraid of have agreed to let the priest's father and sister come to Zeeland for his jubilee commemorating the 25th anniversary of his ordination.

The celebration will be April 4 at his

local Zeeland parish, St. Andrew's Catholic Church. "It will be a very solemn moment for me," said Patejko. "I didn't ever go back (to Poland) and I haven't seen them for so long."

It's been a long 15 years for Patejko, yet he's glad he came to the United States. "It's a good place to live," he said adding, "I like (Zeeland) very much." He especially likes the people in the community, "the fresh air and the space."

Patejko first came to the country to visit an uncle, who put him in contact with a priest who asked a bishop to allow Patejko to be a priest in New Jersey. "They accepted me, so I stayed," he said.

After four years in New Jersey, he discovered there was a shortage of priests in North Dakota. "I had some friends in North Dakota," he said, "and they asked me to come." He's been in Zeeland almost six years now.

"I went back to New Jersey after I'd been here two years," said Patejko, "and now I wouldn't go back there for any money. I couldn't even breathe the air," he exclaimed.

He likes the Zeeland area even better than when he ministered in Austria,

Holland and Rome.

Patejko is particularly pleased that in Zeeland, he has an opportunity for a special type of ministry, radio broadcasts.



steve
andrist

Since Christmas time, Patejko has had a 30-minute program on KFYZ radio once a week. "I call it 'A Talk With Accent'," he said "because I still talk with an accent and the accent of the program is on Catholic teaching."

While radio listeners have heard Patejko minister to Catholics and teach protestants about Catholicism in his accent, it's been a while since Patejko has heard an accent spoken back at him. He's waiting for April 4.