

ST. JOSEPH KSKJ LOCAL LODGE, BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

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Two characteristic features of the small Slovenian community of Bridgeport, whose origin goes back to the beginning of the 20th century, are its Catholic religion and the fact that its members originally came from the Prekmurje region, more precisely the parishes of Turnišče, Beltinci, Bogojina, Cankova, Selnica, and Štrigova. Their ties with the Hungarians, created in their homeland, brought them to the same part of the city where a large Hungarian group was already living, in the parish of St. Stephen's. It was necessary to develop certain ways of coexistence and collaboration. This resulted in mutual influence, as the Slovenians experienced being a minority.¹ At the beginning of World War I, hundreds left the United States and returned to their homeland. The remaining numbers continued their lives and put down roots for a lasting stay in the New World.

THE SLOVENIAN PARISH

Tracing the beginning of the Slovenian Catholic Church community in Bridgeport, we meet an original clerical personality, Mihael Golob, a priest of the Maribor Diocese.² In March 1912 he left his post of assistant pastor at Kri-

¹ See J. A. Arnez, *Slovenian Community in Bridgeport, Conn.*, New York–Washington 1971, pp. 5–6. This is the only comprehensive work dedicated to the Holy Cross community. It also contains news about Local Lodge no. 148.

² He was born on October 22, 1881 at Št. Florijan near Velenje, was ordained as a priest on July 25, 1905, and worked in various parishes in the Maribor Diocese, among them Št. Ilj near Maribor, Sv. Križ pri Ljutomeru, and Nova Cerkev. See the article publis-

ževci in order to avoid the consequences of his political activities, namely, according to the Austrian authorities, his excessive Slovenian national consciousness. With the help of the Franciscan Father Kazimir Zakrajšek, at that time a guest at the St. Nicolas German Church in New York and an occasional pastoral visitor to the Slovenians in Bridgeport, Rev. Golob was authorized by the Bishop of Hartford to take care of the Catholics of Slovenian origin in the city of Bridgeport, Conn. On June 13, 1913, a new parish was established in the Diocese of Hartford, destined to develop pastoral activities for the Slovenians. It was dedicated to the Holy Cross.³ Before that, for a certain period at the Bishop's request, they were hosted by the Slovak and French Churches. Before beginning his mission among the Slovenians, Fr. Golob, through Fr. Zakrajšek's mediation, settled in the parish of the Slovak pastor Rev. Andrej Komar in Bridgeport, St. John Nepomucene. Slowly he started to contact the Slovenians and from time to time gathered them at St. John's.⁴

At the same time another group of Catholic Slovenians, in Bethlehem, Pa., was looking for a priest who spoke their language and for a church where they could worship God in their native tongue. The Archbishop of Philadelphia allowed them to build a church, where the first Mass was celebrated on October 28, 1917. Their first pastor was Fr. Anselm Murn from the Franciscan Community in New York. Fr. Zakrajšek showed interest in this parish as well. He wrote in his memoirs that he personally intervened for the Slovenian parish with the

hed in *The Bridgeport Post*, February 7, 1950, which was reproduced by J. A. Arnez in the above mentioned work, pp. 19–20.

³ »(The) Parish's name of Holy Cross was given in all probability by Father Golob himself. There may be two reasons why he selected that name for the new parish: one of them was the respect and the gratitude he wanted to express to the Slovenian Franciscan Fathers who belonged to the Holy Cross Province; another was the fact that Rev. Golob served in (the) parish at Sv. Križ (Holy Cross) in Slovenia.« – J. A. Arnez, *Slovenian Community in Bridgeport, Conn.*, p. 18. Concerning the history of the parish, Fr. Kazimir Zakrajšek stated Fr. Golob's reason for the choice: »He founded the parish which in gratitude to our Commisariate of Holy Cross dedicated to the same patron.« See K. Zakrajšek, *Med Prekmurci v Bridgeportu, Conn.*, *Glasiló K.S.K. Jednote*, September 16, 1942, p. 3.

⁴ At the time of the founding of Holy Cross Church, the city of Bridgeport was part of the diocese of Hartford. The diocese of Bridgeport was founded as late as 1953. The original documents could therefore be found in the archives of the respective diocese.

Archbishop of Philadelphia. After receiving the Bishop's consent, he sent Fr. Anzelm Murn to the parish.⁵

Since the two communities were mostly composed of Slovenian faithful who came from the Prekmurje region, they had to cope with almost the same problems, the main one being their original dialect and their desire to have a priest able to preach in their tongue. This was linked to the question of national identity. The Hungarian government, in fact, sent a priest to the two parishes to undermine the influence of the Slovenians from the other regions of Slovenia and to increase the loyalty of the parishioners to the Hungarian cultural and political influence. »The plot was uncovered in Bridgeport, and he (sc. Rev. Lovrenc Horvath, a priest and an agent of the Hungarian government) was ordered out of the diocese by the bishop. His second mission was in Bethlehem, and he experienced such success there that the Hungarian government dispatched a second Prekmurje Slovenian priest.«⁶

In spite of the opposition by some parishioners who disagreed with Rev. Golob, the parish continued to realize its plans. Various groups contributed their share for the improvement of the church. In 1916 a new rectory was added, and later on additional land was purchased for an eventual parish school. The Bishop of Hartford, the Most Rev. John J. Nolan, stood behind Rev. Golob's activities and supported him with his authority. Thus Fr. Golob remained pastor at Holy Cross until his death in 1950.⁷

As we have seen, Fr. Golob's major work lay in building up and furnishing the local church; he did not do this by himself, but was able to attract those who were willing to accept the parish as their own. Attacks on his work usually derived from political or personal reasons; at the same time all the attacks played an important role in the community, as they slowly became a cause of tensions. Those documents which still exist prove that Fr. Golob had to use all of his natural strength of character to defend himself and show that the accusations against him weren't true. From this perspective, he started to come up with all kinds of new ideas. These ideas were usually aimed towards activities, such as getting

⁵ See K. Zakrajšek, *Med Prekmurci v Bridgeportu, Conn., Glasilo K.S.K. Jednote*, September 16, 1942, p. 3.

⁶ S. Antalics, *The Role of the Clergy in Promoting Old Nationalisms among Foreign Ethnic Minorities*, in: *Slovenia*, 10 (1996), no. 2, p. 53.

⁷ See *History of the Holy Cross Parish, Holy Cross Parish Diamond Jubilee. 75th Celebration*, Fairfield 1988.

community members together, increasing the sense of belonging to the parish and affirmation of Slovenian identity in a multiethnic city. The main focus in his years of work was directed towards paying off loans to the church and the rectory, and also buy some additional furniture which was needed for normal parish life. In the midst of the difficulties in his work, he felt a strong support from the Slovenian Franciscans, who were working for the same aims through publications and many different activities. They helped Fr. Golob with various pastoral services and would take his place whenever he was not available to his flock.

At the time of his arrival in the United States, Fr. Mihael Golob stopped at the Franciscans' house in New York. After the departure of Fr. Anzelm Murn to Bethlehem, Pa., Fr. Golob saw to the needs of Slovenians in New York. Thinking about his future, he became an active partner in preparing the magazine *Ave Maria*. (From this perspective one can already discern his future interest with the publications in the Bridgeport parish.) When on June 17, 1917, the first Slovenian magazine, *Sv. Jožefa Glasnik*, was printed in Bethlehem, Fr. Golob immediately responded by introducing the new magazine to his community as a community publication. To emphasize the importance of the magazine and to get his people interested, he included in the magazine the names of the parish's donors, attempting to make *Sv. Jožefa Glasnik* a parish bulletin.⁸

Because the Slovenian group that settled in Bridgeport and the surrounding area were from the Hapsburg political and ecclesiastical sphere, their typical characteristics could be viewed even from the outside, in that they had their own ideas about the Church and its pastors. However, their experience of a parish was different from the American one, especially concerning the methods of organizing their parish community life, American parish communities being organized in their own traditional way. One of the most obvious differences was in the way of dealing with parish finances and financial support given to pastors; namely, in their home country, Church financing came from the government. Thus, the people thought that the basis for the parish's budgetary and economic stability was the government. However, in the United States all the responsibility for the parish community was handed over to the parishioners. Therefore, it took a while for the parishioners of Holy Cross to adjust to this kind of life and their responsibilities.

In his final years as a pastor in Bridgeport, Fr. Golob tried very hard to

⁸ See J. A. Arnez, *Slovenian Community in Bridgeport, Conn.*, p. 64; D. Friš, *Ameriški Slovenci in katoliška Cerkev 1871–1924*, Celovec–Ljubljana–Dunaj 1995, p. 357.

find a successor who could identify with and speak the language of the Holy Cross parishioners, so that in this way he could continue the origins of his parish. The first one who raised his voice and asked for intervention was Fr. Kazimir Zakrajšek, who at that time was working for the St. Raphael Association in Slovenia. He was looking for pastoral help but the idea couldn't get through, because the war interfered with the priest who was about to come from Fr. Golob's home diocese and help in the parish. It happened that after Fr. Golob's death, the parish was temporarily administered by a Slovak priest born in the United States, Fr. Stephen Vitka. After 1951, the parish received a Slovenian priest from Križevci near Ljutomer, Dr. Andrej Farkaš. He was already acquainted with the founder of the parish, Fr. Golob, as well as the parishioners, because he had visited them on a few prior occasions.⁹

RELIGIOUS AND FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Fr. Mihael Golob and all of his successors were familiar with the lifestyle in the parish, which was supposed to be very active in sacramental life, religious education and even in activities lying outside of strictly religious areas. With this in mind, they promoted various activities throughout the liturgical year in the parish, i.e. parish banquets, parties, theatricals, coffee klatsches. All of these gatherings were organized with one purpose, to collect money for a better economic situation in the parish. The rest of the money was earmarked for other church activities, such as parish missions, the annual 40 Hours Devotions, confirmations, triduums, visiting priests or bishops, parish jubilees. To accomplish all of their carefully planned aims, they founded numerous confraternities and fraternal organizations. Slovenian priests had already had some experience with these types of organizations in their home country, where they had blossomed before the outbreak of World War I. Major work in those activities was carried out by the Franciscan Fathers from Slovenia, working among Slovenian people in the United States. They supported the religious and fraternal organizations as an expression of their religious life.

Among many others, the Holy Cross parish initiated the following confraternities and religious associations:

⁹ See K. Zakrajšek, *Med Prekmurci v Bridgeportu, Conn., Glasilo K.S.K. Jednote*, September 16, 1942, p. 3.

- Confraternity of Mary Scapulary (Bratovščina škapulirske Marije), 1913
- Third Order of Saint Francis of Assisi (Tretji red), 1913
- Confraternity of the Holy Rosary (Bratovščina svetega rožnega venca), 1915
- Sodality of the Virgin Mary (Marijina družba), 1915 (which suspended its activities for a period of time and started up again in 1933)
- Holy Name Society (Društvo Nasvetejšega imena Jezusovega), 1933
- Sodality of Christian Mothers (Društvo krščanskih mater), 1933.¹⁰

Fr. Kazimir Zakrajšek blessed the flag of the Sodality of Christian Mothers in 1942 and on that occasion wrote: »This society is the foundress of all other Mother's societies which were founded in the United States. It will be a vivid remainder of the Holy mission which took place in your parish.«¹¹

For English-speaking women, Fr. Zakrajšek founded the Ladies Guild. At the time Fr. Farkaš was pastor, a Men's Society was founded, named after Saints Cyril and Methodius, whose main role was to attract the male population to the parish, especially those who hadn't been active in English speaking associations. The fraternities promoted a variety of activities. But we have to face the facts that the pastors did not have enough attentive ears for them and did not have time to keep up with all of the activities. The result of this lack of time was that many of the new organizations died after a short period. In spite of these difficulties, such groups were a strong support to the parish's projects. In many cases, the societies played an important role in collecting money for furnishings, organizing parish meetings, sports events, and various financial collections. They were also active in other groups, working in the parish in their specific mission. Since Fr. Golob was not available to assist all of the associations, the Franciscans from New York would occasionally come to the parish and help the parishioners (particularly their own Third Order in the parish).

The life and activities of the Slovenian community were for the most part reported on every month in *Ave Maria Magazine*, *Ave Maria Calendar*, *Amerikanski Slovenec*, etc. Sadly, we do not have any of these publications in the archives. The reason is that the documents were moved so many times from one place to another, so that they became lost or ended up in private hands; in this

¹⁰ See J. A. Arnez, *Slovenian Community in Bridgeport, Conn.*, pp. 34–36.

¹¹ See K. Zakrajšek, *Med Prekmurci v Bridgeportu, Conn.*, *Glasilo K.S.K. Jednote*, September 16, 1942, p. 3.

way, we have lost all of the minutes and a majority of the documents from the past.

For the Slovenian newcomers to the United States, fraternal organizations were a new experience in their lives. In their homeland they had not had any encounter with these kinds of organizations, but if by chance they did, they would have been of a smaller size, such as professional associations. These types of fraternities became rooted among the Slovenians very quickly; they were a new way of helping each other. The first and most important purpose of all the organizations was solidarity among its members, which meant collecting money for times of unemployment, or for the sick and disabled. In a sense, it could be said that they tried to cover areas where the State did not do its part. All of these movements were filled with a special national flavor and with Christian principles; they were also a great support for all kinds of pastoral activities in their parishes. However, we cannot fail to mention the impact of their political and ideological orientation, which played a decisive role within the religious and fraternal associations as well as on their members.

ST. JOSEPH'S LODGE NO. 148

Parish life had been organized, and the parish of Holy Cross soon had a good number of parishioners. Their economic status allowed the parishioners to organize different supportive fraternal groups. In organizing themselves, inspiration was provided by organizations in other Slovenian communities.

On January 26, 1913, the Slovenian community began its regular religious service in the basement of St. Anthony's Church, the same place where the fraternal lodge *Društvo sv. Jožefa* had been founded. Shortly thereafter (on February 15, 1913) it joined the Carniolean Slovenian Catholic Union (*Kranjsko-slovenska katoliška jednota = K.S.K.J.*) and was given the number 148. »It was joined on that first day by 36 people from Holy Cross parish. The first committee to preside over the lodge was composed of a president, Štefan Dominko, vice president, Peter Ferencak, secretary and delegate Father Mihael Golob, and a treasurer, Štefan Horvat.«¹² The latter was the first person who passed away as a member of the St. Joseph Local Lodge.

Initially, the St. Joseph Local Lodge did well financially as a result of not

¹² J. A. Arnez, *Slovenian Community in Bridgeport, Conn.*, p. 51.

having a large amount of ill members, and the incomes were good. The St. Joseph lodge was also active in parish life; the members collected money and supported parish activities.¹³ As pastor, Fr. Mihael Golob served as a link in the community; as the spiritual director of the local lodge he protected its members from different bad influences and saw to the Catholic character of the association. He put a special emphasis on the members getting married in the Church.

The constant (and often overemphasized) historical and regional character of the Slovenians under the Hapsburg monarchy made a deep impact on them in their native land, and had strong consequences on those who moved to the United States. In Bridgeport the majority of the Slovenian people were from the Prekmurje region, so it was normal to expect that the parish would have those kinds of characteristics in their culture. Therefore, it was almost in vain to expect that they would get along with groups from other Slovenian regions in the parish. Regional differences were, on purpose, stressed by the priest who was sent by Hungarian authorities with special tasks to work on with them. Keeping this in mind, we now understand that when the St. Joseph Local Lodge started to work with the Carniolean Slovenian Catholic Union, the fact that their name contained the word 'Carniolean' (Carniolan) was taken by many as a sign which meant that all the members from Prekmurje had to leave this organization and join one founded by and for people from the Prekmurje region exclusively. In this case, this was a special mutual organization called the First Slovenian Mutual Fraternal Society in America (Prvo Szlovenszko Bratovcsine Pomagajoucze Društvo vu Ameriki = P.S.B.D.), which had already been founded on June 1, 1912, by the Slovenian community in Bethlehem, Pa. This organization stayed within its self-imposed boundary and was organized according to its regional particulars and with a small number of local lodges. In Bridgeport they founded Local Lodge no. 3. The name K.S.K.J. has been a sore point throughout its history, and the members from Bridgeport suggested many times that they would change it, with the danger being that they would diminish the number of their members. Whenever they held meetings they would leave out the attribute 'Carniolean', as a result of all the arguments among them, and preferred to refer to themselves as the Catholic Benefit Group of St. Joseph in Bridgeport.¹⁴

¹³ See *Jubilejna spominska knjiga. 1894–1924*, Cleveland 1924, p. 96.

¹⁴ The same title was also given to the booklet *Pravila in plačilna knjižica katoliškega slovenskega podpornega društva St. Joseph v Bridgeportu, Conn., šte. 148 K.S.K.J.* See also D. Friš – B. Kolar – A. Vovko, *Prvih sto let Kranjsko slovenske katoliške jednote. Pregled zgodovine KSKJ 1894–1994*, Ljubljana 1997.

Another reason for less efficient work of the local lodge was the personality of the pastor, Fr. Golob, who had actually had the idea to found the organization and was an active member himself. The religious dimension in life was a very important part of the local lodge (and of the entire K.S.K.J.). The direction and practical aims can be derived from the name itself. The supreme spiritual director of Jednota, and the spiritual directors of the local lodges, controlled and looked after the religious life of their members. Every Easter they would have an overview of the work and life of the members in the local lodges. With the help of Jednota, Fr. Golob tried to bring into the parish of Holy Cross some Christian principles, but this idea did not fall on fertile soil; in fact, even the opposite effect occurred. The members started to rebel by changing their membership to other local lodges nearby, where the control wasn't as strict as in Bridgeport's local lodge. Likewise, one reason was that the pastors from new areas did not know these parishioners well. It was not only the rebellion against the local lodge which had a specific 'Carniolan' nature, but also rebellion against the principles which led the entire Jednota. The occasion for rebellion was the local pastor himself, who was lingering upon the Jednota's religious nature. His determination could be seen whenever it came to that point of Jednota, especially when the members' lives went against the manners of Christian life in the parish. J. A. Arnez cites from Fr. Golob's announcements book for November 1, 1931, his words: »Društvo sv. Jožefa had a banquet past Sunday, which ended with fighting. That is the way to show you are brothers!« (i.e. members of a Catholic organization).¹⁵

To meet the expectations of a large number of his parishioners and to get rid of the main sticking point (the name of the local lodge), Fr. Golob founded on January 23, 1921, a new fraternity called Farno betežne pomagajoče društvo fare sv. Križa (The Parish Benefit Society for the infirm members of the Holy Cross Parish). At one point he said, »You should know that this society has been founded to give you a chance of getting insurance in case of sickness or difficulties; so now the good parishioners will not need to register with anti-Church, Lutheran or Calvinist lodges. In our lodge there is a place for every Catholic Slovenian who is willing to submit himself to a right discipline.«¹⁶ The fraternity was too small and did not have enough members to survive for a long period, and ended its labors on January 28, 1923. The organization, which had already been given to the fraternity, was given back to the members.

¹⁵ J. A. Arnez, *Slovenian Community in Bridgeport, Conn.*, p. 44.

¹⁶ Quoted by J. A. Arnez, *Slovenian Community in Bridgeport, Conn.*, p. 53.

Relationships among the parishioners improved after World War I. They did not rebel against the pastor anymore and also gave up arguments, especially in areas where Fr. Golob had put his word. The change could be clearly seen in the larger number of members. In 1924 the adult branch of the local lodge counted around 109 members, and 36 in its juvenile branch. Five years later (1929), in the period of its greatest growth, there were 222 in the first branch and 145 in the youth branch.¹⁷ For the Jednota, the '20s were the time of the biggest numerical increase and a variety of activities. Thus, the fraternity became attractive for many people from the Holy Cross parish; this was the only way that the economic recession of the late '20s did not badly hurt them. At the end of World War II, the number increased to 399 members, which gave the local lodge the right to have three delegates to the convention.¹⁸

The political changes in Slovenia after World War II were in a special way present among and felt by Slovenians all over the world. In that difficult period a major role in the work for immigrants was played by the Franciscan Fr. Bernard Ambrožič and his coworkers. As a secretary of the League of Catholic Slovenian Americans (*Lige Katoliških Slovencev v Ameriki*) he organized widely dispersed help for overseas immigrants.¹⁹ A big hand in the help with collections was given by Jednota, whose main work dealt with integrating newcomers into local lodges as well as into the new milieu where they found a possibility for a new beginning.²⁰ The end of the '40s and the early '50s saw a large group of political immigrants settle in Bridgeport and its vicinity. Among them were Serbs, Muslims, and Croats, but the majority were Slovenians. Fr. Andrej Farkaš was pastor of Holy Cross parish and helped them with arranging sponsors for housing and jobs. Even though the immigrants came from different parts of Yugoslavia, he did not care; the main purpose was to obtain a larger number of parishioners and with that in mind, he built a future for his parish.

When Fr. Vitka left the parish a number of Slovak parishioners left as well, and a decline in the congregation resulted. However, according to some estimates from that time, some 500 Slovenians were settling in this part of Connecticut.²¹

¹⁷ See J. A. Arnez, *Slovenian Community in Bridgeport, Conn.*, p. 54.

¹⁸ See *Glasilo K.S.K.J.*, 32 (1946), no. 21, May 22, 1946.

¹⁹ See P. B. Ambrožič, *Pomota se popravi, kjer se pojavi. Ob desetletnici League of CSA, Koledar Svobodne Slovenije 1956*, pp. 202–208.

²⁰ See Ligaš, *Liga Katoliških Slovenskih Amerikancev, Koledar Svobodne Slovenije 1952*, pp. 81–85.

²¹ See J. A. Arnez, *Slovenian Community in Bridgeport, Conn.*, p. 73.

That kind of immigration was also felt in Local Lodge no. 148. In the mid-'50s it reached its highest number, 800 members. This was a result of pastor Farkaš's organizing a great deal of activities where the newcomers were involved. They started with drama, music performances, choirs, etc., and also organized a variety of pilgrimages. Groups like the Tamburizans from Pittsburgh were regularly invited, and on these occasions they needed to hire bigger rooms to perform. With that purpose in mind, the parish community together with the pastor renovated underground rooms in the church and the places became available for groups and their meetings.

The St. Joseph Local Lodge held its own activities once a month; their monthly meetings were on the third Sunday after the last service. The money collected from different activities was spent to help the political immigrants and refugees from Europe. The newspaper *Ameriška Domovina* would regularly publish articles under the title *Izpod stolpa sv. Križa* (From under the Holy Cross tower), and brought news about the Slovenian community and their work in Bridgeport. It was a great help for Slovenians who lived in the diocese of Bridgeport (founded in 1953), to become widely known. With the newcomers, the territorial and social status of the parish of Holy Cross acquired a new face, and along with them difficulties unknown until then were brought to the parish. The differences among the prewar and postwar immigrants came to such a point that they changed the entire board of the local lodge. From 1933 until 1960, the secretary of the local lodge was Stefan Piczko, who left an original impact on the lodge. The documents in the lodge archives are written in the Prekmurje Slovenian dialect, which gave a characteristic feature to the local lodge in its first 50 years. From those documents can be discerned the nature of the parish and the purposes of their activities which were planned together with the pastor, and at the same time it could be seen that the majority of the most active members in the local lodge were immigrants from the Prekmurje region. They brought with them their own specific way of life to the Holy Cross parish, which was also their way of interacting in the new country.

In the late '50s, all of the changes got the ball rolling. The secretaries began to use the English language as the official method of communication; for special occasion they would translate the texts into Slovenian. All the lodge activities still had the purposes of covering the local lodge's expenses; for various benefits (i.e. children's Christmas parties), or with the purpose of supporting the parish. A special impact on all those parish activities for many decades had been made by Jože Bojnec, who became a member of the local lodge in Bridgeport

after he had joined the Slovenian community in the early '30s, and put an effort into bringing together the local lodge and the parish. Bojnec was an active member of the parish council, a member of different groups and an officer of St. Joseph Local Lodge. »He has been an active member in all activities in the parish. He worked as a financial administrator from 1952, later on he became secretary of the local lodge and its auditor for almost 36 years and the last two years as honorary member and adviser. He ran the lodge by himself and took care of many activities. And the people knew that his house was always welcoming. He was very supportive when it came to the question of youth activities, Christmas celebrations, and parish picnics, etc.«²² Bojnec was a convention delegate for almost 30 years.

Despite of the fact that the number of members was not too low, there were not enough volunteers to support special customary services, such as pall bearers. With times changing, new rules arrived. If, until the 1970s, on Palm Sunday the entire community received communion as an obligation, after the '70s this kind of religious practice was not seen as appropriate. Only those practices which remained as an obligation for the members of the entire Jednota were still followed; this was the Easter obligation, which was almost an essential indicator of Catholic identity.

At the beginning of the '60s, when the future of the Holy Cross parish was in question, the fact also had a strong impact on St. Joseph Lodge and its members. As we have said, the parish and the local lodge worked closely with each other. But the fact that many members of the lodge had already moved away from the Bridgeport location of the church meant that they were ready to seek a new site for the church building and make easier access to the church possible for a larger number of parishioners. In the past, Fr. Farkaš had already been thinking about moving the church building; at one time he even thought that it would be necessary to close the parish. After his death in 1967, the parish was administered by Fr. Alojzij Hribšek.²³

Together with his parishioners, Fr. Hribšek made the decision to keep the

²² A. Malensek, V blag spomin Jožefu Bojnecu, dolgoletnemu društvenemu tajniku, *Amerikanski Slovenec-Glasilo K.S.K.J.*, vol. 99, no. 12, June 8, 1988, p. 8. Bojnec originated from Bogojina; he left Slovenia for America in 1930 and settled in Bridgeport the following year.

²³ Dr. Andrej Farkaš died in an automobile accident on January 20, 1967. See *Prečastiti gospod dr. Andrej Farkaš, drugi župnik slovenske cerkve sv. Križa v Bridgeportu, Conn., USA.*

Slovenian parish alive and to build a new church. The new church, in Fairfield, was finished and dedicated on November 26, 1972.²⁴ On May 4, 1980, they finished an additional complex for the purpose of different activities organized by the parish pastoral center.²⁵ In the period of building the new church and reorganizing the parish, the most active role was again played by the St. Joseph Local Lodge, not to deny the work of all the other active groups and fraternities in the parish, whose interest in the future parish's planning was obvious. As Fr. Hribšek said: »St. Joseph Local Lodge does not depend on the parish and the parish does not depend on the local lodge. Working together is beneficial for both sides. We can understand the motives which guided the long time secretary Jožef Bojnec...during his life.«²⁶

When the new parish church in Fairfield was completed, a very active part in furnishing it was again played by the St. Joseph Lodge. The donations helped to pay for the minimum functioning of the parish church and the pastoral center next to it. St. Joseph Local Lodge decided on December 12, 1971, to buy a new altar for the church and two brand new candleholders, which was a great help in keeping parish debts low.²⁷ But from a different perspective the entire parish and various groups had a convenient advantage, because there was enough room for their activities in the pastoral center.

On its 75th anniversary in 1988 the St. Joseph Local Lodge had some 365 active members, and on this occasion the secretary stated: »The anniversary of St. Joseph Local Lodge no. 148 KSKJ is very meaningful because the majority of its members are from the Holy Cross parish. Our local lodge does not have its own rooms but we can use the parish facilities for our activities.«²⁸ This was the opportunity to organize a campaign for new members, if we keep in mind that their average age was very high and their number was decreasing.

²⁴ See *Dedication of the Holy Cross Church November 26, 1972*. »In spite of its continuity, Holy Cross-parish in 1972 is in many ways different from the one in 1915. The parish is still the same in name; it is still ethnic and not a territorial parish. Naturally and gradually it has become a parish of native Americans who cherish the traditions of their immigrant parents.«

²⁵ See *Dedication Holy Cross Parish Center*, Fairfield, Connecticut, May 4, 1980.

²⁶ Al. Hribšek, Ob grobu rajnega Jožeta Bojneca, *Amerikanski Slovenec-Glasilo K.S.K.J.*, vol. 99, no. 14, July 6, 1988, p. 7.

²⁷ See minutes of December 12, 1971 meeting.

²⁸ A. Malensek, Biserni jubilej društva sv. Jožefa št. 148 KSKJ in fare sv. Križa v Fairfieldu, Conn., *Amerikanski Slovenec-Glasilo KSKJ*, vol. 99, no. 14, July 6, 1988, p. 8.

In accordance with the new organization of the KSKJ and its redefined role, it grew stronger, which meant that the movement brought together its members. The same tendency was also noticeable in the St. Joseph Local Lodge, which saw new types of work and activities among its members. The process of aging and various jubilees meant that the main purpose for celebrating became the anniversaries; nevertheless, they were trying to find other forms of activities for their members. One which had a very positive response among members were 'family festivals'. They were also very supportive of the KSKJ Scholarship Fund. At their meetings they put on the agenda issues about young people and their stronger influence in the local lodge, even though it was clear that these young people were very busy with their school and after-school activities. A great deal of the funds were provided for parish work, common actions and for different purposes, as well as to people in need.

Two of the lodge's original purposes, caretaking and providing health insurance, remained of interest to the older members. The fact was that membership provided the cheapest way of getting health insurance. In the '50s the most important activities became parties. Within this category one can count annual picnics, dances, various games, New Year's celebrations, and celebrating different anniversaries of the members, the parish, or of the local lodge. Here can be seen a high point of working together with the Holy Cross parish. Sometimes the members received the impression that both organizations were connected and that they had the same plans towards reaching the same goals. However, the golden era of the local lodge passed away and the active life slowly declined. Even the number of their celebrations became shortened. The reason for the declining number of activities were found in the aging problem and the non-active lives of the members. Knowing the cause of their problems, the committee did not feel a strong responsibility towards directing the preparation of activities. As a result of their findings, the parish took over the preparation of the New Year's celebrations and picnics.

The elections for new leaders of Local Lodge no. 148 can be considered a sign of interest of young members in the lodge. In 1992 the president of the lodge became Ernest Lagoja, who was 29 years old at the time. During the '90s the life of the lodge again started to flourish. The lodge got new leaders and activities were again at the top of their priorities. Even today, the elections can be understood as a sign of the new spirit and the right path for the future of Jednota. Over all is the truth that this was a result of a feeling of honest belonging to the lodge and fidelity to one's Slovenian roots. Just as an illustration, the current secretary of the lodge still writes and speaks fluent Slovenian.

At the 100th anniversary of Jednota, the officers of the local lodge 148 were: president Ernest E. Lagoja Jr., vice president Louann Leclerc, secretary and treasurer Anton Malensek, recording secretary Kimberly Piczko, auditors John Lukman and Anthony Nemetz.²⁹ The total membership was around 300.

For the 25th anniversary of the moving of the parish center and the anniversary of the building of the new church, the main celebration took place on April 26, 1998. At that time the community took the opportunity to perform one of their periodic overviews of their activities and work.³⁰ The situation in the Holy Cross parish had required a new beginning, though a completely different one from what we know of the period before World War I. The new circumstances called for new features for the parish. At the time of pastor Hribšek, Bishop Curtis, granting permission to transfer the church location, envisioned the coming changes. On that occasion the Bishop said that the time was the major cause which forced the parish to change its typical mission as well as its site: »When you look for a location for the new church, keep in mind that I shall not allow you to build close to any of the existing churches. Your new church will have to serve its neighborhood as its parish church. You will not be serving only the Slovenians.«³¹ The mission of the church was expressed with the words: »To serve Catholics of Slovenian nationality and to accept into membership any neighbors who come to ask to become members.«

The plans of the church community have been part of the primary mission of St. Joseph Local Lodge no. 148. Its members were very active in different ways, especially in organizing trips, preparing St. Nicholas days, organizing wine harvests and preparing May devotions. They had an active part in organizing meetings for guests from all over the world, especially for Slovenians from various parts of America and guests from Canada, Austria and Italy. The parish community did not have enough cultural groups, and this was a moment that they could get in touch with other cultural groups. Lately the parish has not been culturally active by itself; as a sign of their diminishing interest they did not

²⁹ See *100 Years of Strength Through Unity. The Story of the American Slovenian Catholic Union, 1894–1994*, pp. 106–107; D. Friš – B. Kolar – A. Vovko, *Prvih sto let Kranjsko slovenske katoliške jednote. Pregled zgodovine KSKJ 1894–1994*, Ljubljana 1997.

³⁰ See E. Wuennemann, Holy Cross Parish marks 25 years of new Church, *Fairfield County Catholic*, vol. 15, no. 4, April 1998.

³¹ His words are quoted in *Holy Cross in Fairfield. 25th Anniversary*, Fairfield 1998.

invite other groups. The only ray of hope was the Slovenian group from New York, which put an effort into ensuring that Slovenian people did not lack for cultural activities. Together with local communities, they organized different cultural performances in Fairfield. The biggest burden for the local lodge was to dispatch the Slovenian press, but even here a lesser interest could be felt.³²

Recently, a special emphasis has been given to activities which started up at the time when Slovenia became an independent country, among them the Slovenian missionaries in the Third World and the new Slovenian Church institutions. But even before a great amount of support from American Slovenian communities was offered to Fr. J. Klekl from Prekmurje, they were also supporting the Prekmurje region in building new churches (Polana, Odranci), supporting Baraga's Seminary in Ljubljana or different youth centers built in Slovenia by the Salesians between the two wars. In the last few years, a great deal of help has also been offered for building the Slovenian College in Rome, called Slovenik.

CONCLUSION

Among the many different Slovenian groups located all over the United States, the group from Bridgeport, and after a time from Fairfield, stands out as an interesting exception. It had specific features. Although it was not among the largest groups by number – in the early 1960s it had approximately 1500 members – they were able to build up their original church in Bridgeport and a new one together with the pastoral center in the Fairfield area. Considering the life of the community as such besides the local lodge and the parish, they did not do a great deal in the area of other ethnic institutions, which could have brought different interests to them. The only group active since 1913, when the parish was founded, has been St. Joseph Local Lodge no. 148. The local lodge was very active in people's lives through the organizing of different activities, and was a great help to newcomers to the United States. Besides its own method of operation, it organized a good deal of activities which were in accordance with the parish's life and with Church values. Groups with different sorts of political and ideological aims did not survive. As a confirmation of this, we can cite the words of the historian of the community in Bridgeport, Dr. John A. Arnez, who pointed

³² See A. Malensek, *Slovenska kulturna dejavnost pri fari sv. Križa v letih 1972–1997, Holy Cross Church in Fairfield. 25th Anniversary*, Fairfield 1998.

out, »In Bridgeport, all the life centered around the church and the parish: there were no actively opposing groups, a circumstance which removed strong compelling reasons to break the inertia.«³³ In other words, the parish had an important role from the very beginning of the Slovenian community in Bridgeport and afterwards in Fairfield. All other activities were directed towards supporting church life.

The Local Lodge sv. Jožefa no. 148, besides its original purpose – that is, the charitable and insurance activities – had also given active aid in the parish community and helped in promoting the Slovenian community from Connecticut on an all-American level. According to all ethnic initiatives, the Local Lodge of St. Joseph is still active in keeping and promoting a sense of national belonging. It is still active in organizing social activities, and special emphasis is given to educational goals among the younger Slovenian population.

POVZETEK

KRAJEVNO DRUŠTVO K.S.K.J. SV. JOŽEFA V BRIDGEPORTU V CONNECTICUTU

Bogdan Kolar

Krajevno društvo sv. Jožefa št. 148 Kranjsko slovenske katoliške jednote v Bridgeportu in sedaj v Fairfieldu v Connecticutu je bilo ustanovljeno leta 1913, istočasno s tamkajšnjo slovensko župnijo. Že od vsega začetka so v obeh ustanovah prevladovali Slovenci iz Prekmurja, kar je dajalo posebne značilnosti vsem dejavnostim in ustanovama. Več desetletij so se trudili, da so imeli duhovnike, ki so obvladali njihovo narečje. Ker na ozemlju župnije niso nastajale druge etnične ustanove, je bilo skozi vso zgodovino čutiti zelo tesno povezanost med društvom in župnijo. Ta se je posebej pokazala v času, ko je bila ukinjena župnija v Bridgeportu in je bilo potrebno postaviti novo cerkev in ob njej pastoralno središče v Fairfieldu. To je ponudilo gostoljubnost tudi članom krajevnega društva.

³³ See J. A. Arnez, *Slovenian Community in Bridgeport, Conn.*, p. 67.

Pod streho župnijskega doma se srečujejo še danes. Najbolj zavzeti člani društva so aktivni tudi v župniji. Spremembe, do katerih prihaja v vseh etničnih ustanovah v Združenih državah, so prinesle novosti tudi v delovanje skupnosti v Fairfieldu. Sedaj je največja pozornost namenjena družabnim dejavnostim, skrbi za prenašanje narodne zavesti na mlajše rodove in ohranjanju izvirne kulturne dediščine. Sredstva, ki jih z različnimi prireditvami zbere krajevno društvo, so namenjena kulturnim dejavnostim in podpiranju izobraževanja.