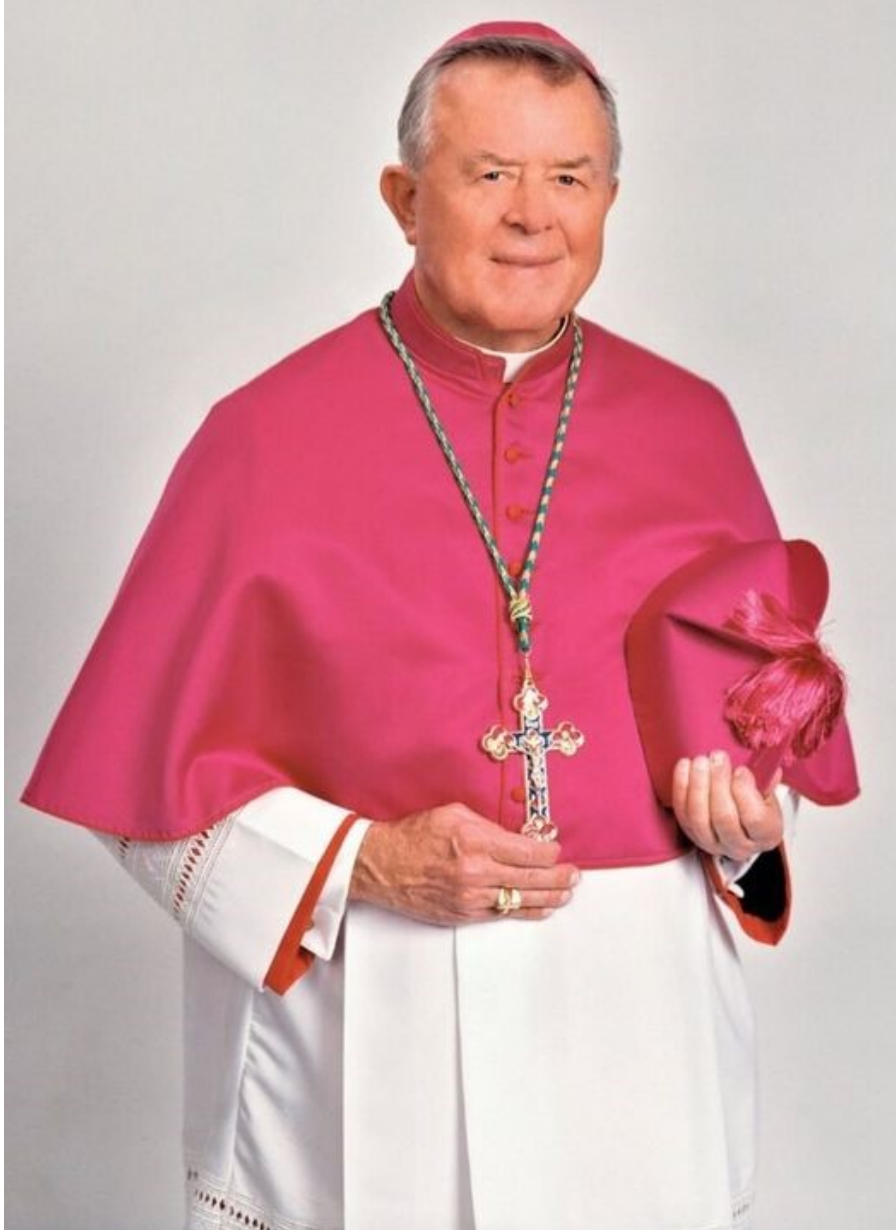




Special Edition, Newsletter #63
Rest in Peace, Bishop Emeritus John Walter Yanta



October 2, 1931—August 6, 2022

Celebrating the life and contributions of Bishop John W. Yanta

Bishop Emeritus John W. Yanta, Chairman of the Board and President of the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria Foundation, died at his residence in San Antonio on August 6, the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord. Just two months shy of his 91st birthday, he lived a life devoted to God and Holy Mother Church. With prayer and faith, he bested severe illness in his later years to see the successful culmination of many of his causes, including the Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade and the opening of the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria.

Funeral services for **Bishop Yanta** were held at St. Mary's Cathedral in Amarillo, with **Bishop Patrick Zurek** as the main celebrant, at San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, with **Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller** as the main celebrant, and at Immaculate Conception Church in Panna Maria, with **Bishop Michael Boulette** as the main celebrant. Burial was in Panna Maria.

The Early Years

John Walter Yanta was born on a farm in Runge, TX on October 2, 1931, the fifth of eight children of **John Andrew Yanta** and **Mary Magdalen Pollok** who were natives of Panna Maria, the oldest Polish parish in the United States. His mother's relatives came from the Pluznica area near Opole with the first families who settled in Panna Maria in 1854.



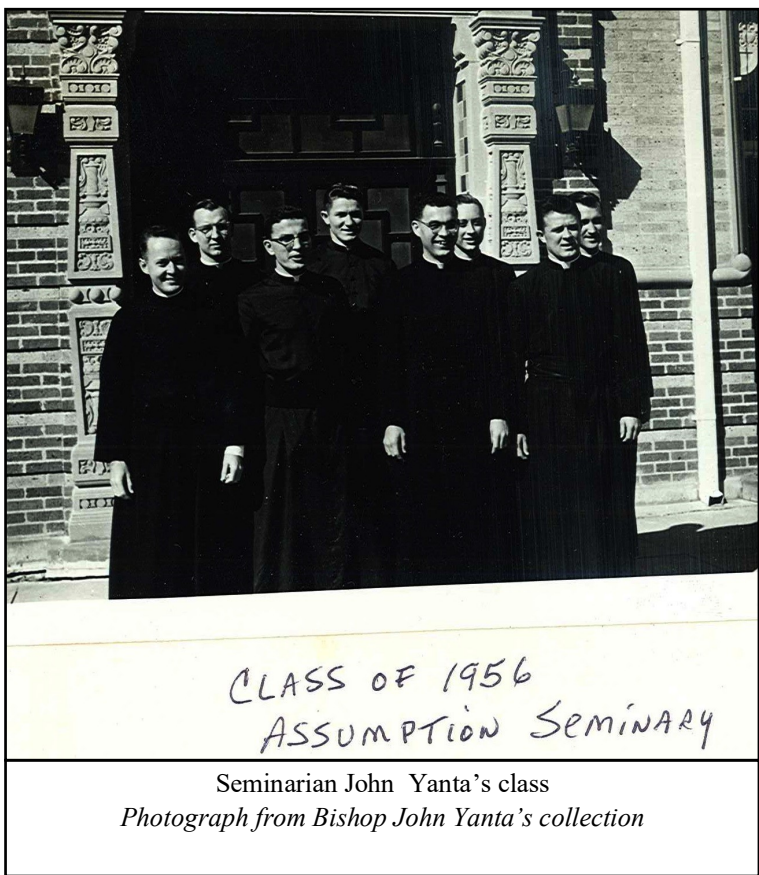
1936

**Back Row: Frank Paul Yanta, Ernest Alex Yanta, Edwin William Yanta
Front Row: Wilfred John Yanta, John Walter Yanta, Valentine John Yanta**

*Yanta boys cooling off!
Photograph from Bishop John Yanta's collection*

The Bishop's parents were married on June 15, 1920, and enjoyed 51 years of marriage before his father died in 1971. The couple's first child was a girl, **Valeria**. Seven sons followed -- **Edwin, Ernest, Wilfred, John, Fabian, Joseph James, and Vernon**. All but **Wilfred** and **Joe** are now deceased. On the farm, there were always chores, remembered the future Bishop. What free time the boys had was spent in kicking a ball or having playful fights. On Sundays there was the creek, fishing, or swimming. They would hunt too. A steady routine of hard work and simple fun molded the entire family.

John attended public school in Runge and then moved to San Antonio to attend Central Catholic High School before entering St. John's Seminary. After three years, he returned home to assist his ailing father in running the farm, but was able to return to St. John's, and then went on to Assumption Seminary. **Bishop Yanta** always wanted to be a priest, but he never shared this with his family in his early years. He said that he was a mischievous little boy and he knew his brothers would have laughed at the idea of him becoming a priest. His heroes were priests. One was the pastor of St. Anthony's in Runge,



Father Charles Drees. The other, a seminarian who spent his summers in Runge teaching religion to the children of the parish before he was ordained, was **Father Erwin Juraschek**. It was **Father Juraschek** who later invited seminarian **John Yanta** to serve in the Archdiocese of San Antonio. He was ordained to the priesthood on March 17, 1956, in San Fernando Cathedral by **Archbishop Robert E. Lucey**.

The Priesthood

Father Yanta's first assignment was as associate pastor of St. Ann's Parish in San Antonio from 1956-1962. He was then named director of the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO). While serving in that capacity until 1968, he also served as associate pastor of Our Lady of Grace, Holy Name, and St. Pius X parishes in San Antonio.



Newly ordained Fr. Yanta giving a blessing at his 1st Mass in Runge, TX

Photograph from Bishop John Yanta's collection

He was the founder of the San Antonio Neighborhood Youth Organization (SANYO) in 1965. SANYO was one of **Father John's** most cherished endeavors. He organized it for the benefit of the impoverished youth of the city at the time of the War on Poverty during **President Lyndon Johnson's** administration. It was an exemplary federally funded program for developing leadership in targeted distressed communities. He was the Executive Director for 6 years and then turned the program over to the leaders he had developed. He also headed up the Archdiocesan Office for the Laity where he directed the Better World Spiritual Renewal program throughout the Archdiocese for 3 years.

In 1973, then **Msgr. Yanta** was named pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in San Antonio. In addition, he was named editor-in-chief of "Today's Catholic," a position he held until 1983. In 1981 he became archdiocesan director of Communications. When the archdiocesan newspaper, "Today's Catholic," was in danger of "fading out," he accepted the position of editor-in-chief. "We got the newspaper back on its feet," he said with pride. While editor of the newspaper, he helped to get Catholic Television of San Antonio (CTSA) off the ground in 1981.

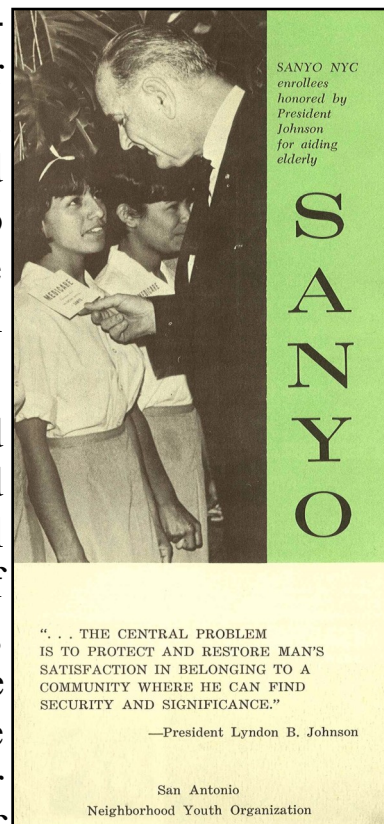


Image of SANYO brochure
Photographs from Bishop John Yanta's collection



John Walter Yanta at his Episcopal Consecration, December 30, 1997
Photographs from Bishop John Yanta's collection

John Walter Yanta was consecrated an Auxiliary Bishop of the San Antonio Archdiocese on the feast of the Holy Family, December 30, 1994 by **Archbishop Patrick Flores**, with **Bishop Nossol** of Opole, Poland and **Bishop Grahmann** of Dallas as co-consecrators, and **Cardinal Maida** of Detroit as the homilist at the ceremony in Panna Maria, Texas. He was the first Bishop to come from the original immigrant families of 1854. When he was appointed auxiliary bishop, Yanta described himself as “happily fulfilled in all my priestly assignments over these 38 years.” He especially paid tribute to his two pastorates, Sacred Heart Parish in the city’s Westside and St. James the Apostle on the Southside, where he was serving when he received his episcopal appointment.

Bishop Yanta earned a reputation as an organizer and a “doer.” An action that brought him into public view was his jail sentence in 1993 for blocking the entrance to the New Women’s Clinic abortion center on San Pedro Avenue. It was the way he chose to observe the 20th anniversary of the "Roe vs. Wade" Supreme Court ruling. “It was a non-Catholic, **Jack DeVault**, who got me actively involved in the Right to Life movement,” he said. “He made me realize that I should do more than give lip service to saving the lives of the unborn.” He added, “I guess you could say I give 101 percent to any project I undertake.”



Portrait of Bishop John Walter Yanta,
7th bishop of the Diocese of Amarillo
Photograph from Bishop John Yanta's collection

On Jan. 21, 1997, **Bishop Yanta** was appointed prelate for the Diocese of Amarillo, and was installed as the Bishop there on March 17, 1997. He served for 11 years and was noted for his strong work ethic in rebuilding the Diocese and his effective pro-life advocacy. He was also active in the US Conference of Catholic Bishops where he served on committees dealing with migration and refugee services, farm workers and marriage and family life.

Completing his service, **Bishop Yanta** became Bishop Emeritus in 2008 and returned to San Antonio where he was active in his efforts to envision, recruit a leadership team and successfully lead the design, development and construction of the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria. He was also active in leading study groups, promoting the rosary and being a mentor

to other leaders in the community.

Bishop Yanta celebrated his 25th anniversary as a bishop on the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph on Sunday, Dec. 29, 2019. The Mass of celebration was held at the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Panna Maria, where he had been ordained as a bishop 25 years earlier on the same feast day. **Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller, MSPS**, was the homilist and **Bishop Emeritus Michael Pfeifer, OMI**, of the Diocese of San Angelo was the principal celebrant. Six other priests served as concelebrants including **Bishop Yanta** had specifically picked the day of the Feast of the Holy Family for his ordination and this jubilee celebration as a reflection of his deep commitment to family.

In a September 2021 **Bishop Yanta** interview with "The West Texas Catholic," newspaper of the Diocese of Amarillo, Bishop Yanta was asked what advice he would give to young men discerning a vocation to the priesthood and what advice he would also give to parents who might be encouraging their sons to seek a vocation to the priesthood.

He responded, “I think my answer to both the men who are discerning a vocational call and to his parents are the same: do not presume whom God calls, He calls all! Be supportive, be prayerful, look for the gift that God is calling on to benefit His Church.”



Bishop John Yanta's
coat-of-arms,
with his motto:

Bear Witness To The Truth

*Photograph from
Bishop John Yanta's collection*

Honoring His Polish Roots

John W. Yanta is the first Texan of Polish descent to become a Bishop. He always had an interest in his Polish ethnicity and heritage and was a charter member of a group of priests founding the Polish American Priests Association (PAPA) of Texas in 1970. He founded the Polish American Congress of Texas in 1971, serving as President for five terms. He attended the Kosciuszko Foundation Summer Session at Jagellonian University, Krakow, Poland, 1971, and the University of Kansas Summer Program at **Adam Mickiewicz University**, Poznan, Poland, 1972. “I have great respect for the variety of ethnic cultures within the archdiocese. It was my exposure to the Hispanic and Black cultures that made me realize that I knew almost nothing of my own Polish heritage,” he said. At the time he was there, Poland was under Communist control and he marveled at the strength of the Catholic Church and the Polish people. “I could understand the euphoria of the Poles when Karol Wojtyla became the first Polish pope,” he said.



1973 trip organized by Fr. John Yanta to Poland to visit the villages of the original immigrants that came to Texas in 1854

Photograph by Polish Press Photographer



Bishop Yanta was the originator and leader of the first-ever pilgrimage to Poland for 54 Texans, many descended from the early immigrants to the Opole areas of Upper Silesia of Poland in 1973. He coordinated Pope John Paul II's visit with Panna Maria parishioners and Texas Polonia on September 13, 1987, and was general chairman of the first Polish American Priests Association Convention, April 16-19, 1990 in San Antonio. He was elected first National President of PAPA on April 11, 1991, in Chicago, Illinois and was general chairman of the Father Leopold Moczygemba Centennial in 1991. He also founded the Polish American Council of Texas (PACT) in 2011. Its mission is to further knowledge of Polish culture, traditions, history, language, arts, current affairs and statewide events in Texas and to facilitate networking among Polish interest groups in Texas.

Fr. John Yanta assisting St. John Paul II during the papal visit to San Antonio, TX, in 1987

Photograph by Polish Press Photographer

On June 13, 2019, during a presidential welcome reception at Our Lady of Częstochowa Church in Houston, **Bishop Yanta** was presented with the *Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit* of the Republic of Poland.

The honor was presented by **President Andrzej Duda** and **First Lady Agata Kornhauser-Duda**. It is awarded to non-citizens and those living abroad for distinguished contributions to international cooperation and was presented in recognition of **Bishop Yanta's** numerous initiatives in the Polish community.

Bishop Yanta thanked **President Duda** and the **First Lady**, stating, "You honor us with your presence — welcome to America and to Texas and its Polonia. I humbly accept this prestigious award in the name of our Polish people living today in Texas and throughout the USA, and in Poland." A number of high-ranking Polish government officials were in attendance, along with over 300 representatives from Texas Polish communities, churches and organizations.

For the past dozen years, **Bishop Yanta** was focused intensely on the development of the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria, whose founding he spearheaded. The first step began in 2008 when he first conceived the best way to remember his immigrant ancestors. He began to ask certain professionals to advise him on ways to bring this discernment to fruition. He made contact with **Steve Harding**, who impressed him with his work in Sarita, Texas, for the Kenedy Memorial Foundation. **Bishop Yanta** provided him with the "Blue Book," which was a compilation of the bishop's Polish heritage. The book was an aid to **Harding** in his task of bringing the bishop's vision to life.



First Lady of the Republic of Poland, Agata Kornhauser-Duda, on left and the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, on the right of Bishop John W Yanta at the reception following being presented the *Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit*

Photograph by Polish Press Photographer



Vice Chairman **Aloys Notzon** and the Chairman and President **Bishop John Yanta** of the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria Foundation Board of Directors meeting being held in a meeting room at St. Paul's Community Center, circa 2019
Photograph from Bishop John Yanta's collection

In April 2016, the land was cleared and prepared for construction. MJ Boyle Construction was contracted to complete the exterior of the building. The exterior of the structure including the roof was completed making the building look finished. However, the interior was incomplete and would be the most difficult and time-consuming phase of construction. In 2018, Keller-Martin was contracted to complete the interior of the building. Construction was interrupted because revisions to the original plans needed to be made to accommodate the extensive technology needed within the exhibit areas and theater. Construction faced yet another challenge with progress being slowed by COVID. But as has been the case throughout **Bishop Yanta's** storied life and career, prayer and faith prevailed. The Polish Heritage Center, a \$14 million structure spanning 16,500 square feet, celebrated its Grand Opening October 23 – 24, 2021.

At the Grand Opening of the Polish Heritage Center, **Bishop Yanta** stated:

“I pray that the project always remains faithful to its goal of being a first class operation and place in every way. Our immigrant ancestors gave us a distinctive first class beginning and I, as one of the descendants, realize the debt I

owe to them. We must pass on their history of faith, of taming their new land and overcoming hardships for future generations.”

Bishop Yanta is survived by brothers **Wilfred Yanta** of Runge and **Joseph James Yanta** of San Antonio. He is preceded in death by his parents, **John Andrew Yanta** and **Mary Magdalen Pollok**, sister **Valeria**, and brothers **Edwin, Ernest, Fabian and Vernon**.

In lieu of flowers, **Bishop Yanta** invites your support of the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria and the Allied Women’s Center.

Excerpts of this story of the life of Bishop Yanta are courtesy of the Archdiocese of San Antonio.

Portion of the eulogy by Al Notzon

“Bishop Yanta was pro-God, pro-Life and pro-Family and his life should be an inspiration to each of us and a challenge to expand our daily prayer life, including the Blessed Mother’s Rosary. As Bishop Yanta said: “Prayer is the most powerful force on Earth”. He wants us to take God’s gifts of time, talent and treasure and share them with others. This was Bishop Yanta’s way of life, and he was able to engage each of us in a friendship and love that was a testament to his faith. His reliance on the Holy Spirit guided him throughout his life. May each of us recall Bishop Yanta personal relationship to us and worthily honor his life.”

From Bishop John W. Yanta’s eulogy given by Mr. Aloys Notzon at the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, Panna Maria, Texas



Bishop John Yanta under the *famous oak tree* where his ancestors first gathered and celebrated their first Mass on Christmas Eve

Photograph courtesy of the image collection of the Polish Heritage Center

*Memorial Gifts “In Loving Memory of
Bishop John W. Yanta”
And Sustaining Gift Recognitions*

Bishop John W. Yanta touched our lives, is loved by many, and his passing is a great loss to everyone. We want to make sure that all who want to memorialize him at the Polish Heritage Center have that opportunity. If you are planning to donate to the Polish Heritage Center in his loving memory, we will recognize donors in the following manner:

A memorial entitled “In Loving Memory of Bishop John W. Yanta” will be placed on the north wall in the Heritage Center near Our Lady of Częstochowa. The names of those who donated to memorialize Bishop John W. Yanta which are received through December 31, 2022, will be listed in alphabetical order, limited to 40 characters, and displayed in beautiful gold frames.

Each donation is limited to one line no matter how many individuals contributed to the donation; therefore, a donation listing several names remains limited to the 40 characters. A group donation and/or organizational donation will be listed as the group or organization and limited to 40 characters. Examples of group recognition would be: The family of John Smith or Members of Steve’s Charity.

If your memorial donation is \$10,000 or more, you will also enter the “Sustaining our Mission” recognition which is located on the south wall in the Polish Heritage Center near Our Lady of Częstochowa. Donors of \$10,000 or more will be listed both in the alphabetical listing in the “In Loving Memory of Bishop John W. Yanta” memorial and in the “Sustaining our Mission” recognition. Upon entering the “Sustaining our Mission” recognition, additional memorialization lines of recognition for loved ones will be available in accordance with the recognition guidelines. Donor recognition in the “Sustaining our Mission” will be based upon the cumulative total of your donations beginning with January 1, 2022, and years forward; therefore, allowing donors to move into and to increase level status throughout the years.

We are grateful to everyone who supported and continues to support the Polish Heritage Center. It is your generosity that made this project possible and is sustaining its operations. Thank you!!!

SEKRETARZ STANU
PEŁNOMOCNIK RZĄDU DO SPRAW
POLONII I POLAKÓW ZA GRANICĄ



Jan Dziejczak

DWPP.WPP.042.16.2022.KB

Warsaw, 12th of August 2022

Aloys J. Notzon Vice-Chair

The Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria

Dear Mr. Notzon,

It is with great sadness that I received the news of the death of a faithful servant of the Church, son of Texas and America, a representative of the Polish community in America and a friend of Poland, Bishop John Walter Yanta.

As the Government Plenipotentiary for the Polish Diaspora and Poles Abroad, I would like to convey my condolences to his family and to all those who had the privilege of knowing His Excellency. The Polish diaspora, especially in America, has always been close to me, the Polish community that has been instrumental in creating the USA for hundreds of years. The symbol of this beautiful friendship is Panna Maria, Texas and the Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is one of the most important places for Poles in the USA. The contribution of Polish emigrants and their descendants to the development of America cannot be overestimated in all areas. It was in Panna Maria that the beautiful story of a close collaboration that continues until today began. Bishop John Walter Yanta was a great example as a descendant of the first Polish immigrants, he faithfully served all the people of San Antonio and Texas, the faithful Americans.

He devoted an important part of his life to Poland. He built a wonderful monument to Polish- American and Polish-Texan friendship and community in faith and love of freedom, which is the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria, the place where he himself was consecrated a bishop. He co-founded the Polish American Priests Association and took an active part in the work of many Polish diaspora organizations in Texas. For his services, in 2019 he was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit by the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda.

We thank him for his work, thank him for his message and pray for his soul. As the Government Plenipotentiary for the Polish Diaspora and Poles Abroad, I extend my deepest sympathy and support to the family, relatives and all the faithful affected by the Bishop's departure. The absence of those who depart can only be healed by time. Honor to his memory!



Ministerstwo
Spraw Zagranicznych
Sekretarz Stanu
Szymon Szynkowski vel Sęk

Warszawa, 8 sierpnia 2022 r.

Do Rodziny i Bliskich śp. biskupa Johna W. Yanty

Z głębokim smutkiem i żalem przyjąłem wiadomość o śmierci biskupa Johna W. Yanty – zasłużonego działacza polonijnego w Stanach Zjednoczonych, oddanego postudze kapłańskiej duszpasterza i wielkiego patrioty.

Biskup John W. Yanta swoją działalność na niwie polonijnej łączył z postugą kapłańską w San Antonio, gdzie przyjął święcenia kapłańskie. Będąc duchownym niezmiennie pozostawał blisko spraw polonijnych jako członek – założyciel Stowarzyszenia Księży Polsko – Amerykańskich, koordynator wizyty Jana Pawła II w Teksasie, redaktor naczelny Today's Catholic oraz inicjator Katolickiej Telewizji San Antonio. Jako kierujący przedsięwzięciem oraz jeden z największych sponsorów, przyczynił się do uruchomienia Centrum Dziedzictwa Polskiego w Pannie Marii – rodzinnym mieście swoich przodków, którzy osiedlili się w nim w 1854 r. Za swoje zasługi Biskup John W. Yanta został odznaczony Krzyżem Komandorskim Orderu Zasługi RP, który otrzymał z rąk Prezydenta RP Andrzeja Dudy.

Śmierć biskupa Johna W. Yanty to niepowetowana strata dla amerykańskiej Polonii. Biskup John W. Yanta na zawsze pozostanie w naszej pamięci jako głęboko oddany sprawom polskim patriota, którego dziedzictwo kultywowane będzie przez kolejne pokolenia. Cześć jego pamięci!

Szymon Szynkowski vel Sęk
Sekretarz Stanu



Ministerstwo
Spraw Zagranicznych
Sekretarz Stanu
Szymon Szyrkowski vel Sęk

Warszawa, 8 sierpnia 2022 r.

To the Family and Loved Ones of the late Bishop John W. Yanta 'anty

It was with deep sadness and sorrow that I received the news of the death of Bishop John W. Yanta – a distinguished activist of the Polish diaspora in the United States, a priest and a great patriot.

Bishop John W. Yanta combined his activity in the field of The Polish diaspora with the ministry in San Antonio, where he was ordained a priest. As a clergyman, he invariably remained close to the affairs of the Polish diaspora as a founding member of the Association of Polish-American Priests, coordinator of John Paul II's visit to Texas, editor-in-chief of Today's Catholic and initiator of the Catholic Television San Antonio. As the head of the project and one of the largest donors, he contributed to the launch of the Polish Heritage Center in Panna Maria – the hometown of his ancestors, who settled there in 1854. For his merits, Bishop John W. Yanta was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, which he received from the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda.

The death of Bishop John W. Yanta is an irreparable loss for the American Polonia. Bishop John W. Yanta will forever remain in our memory as a patriot deeply devoted to Polish causes, whose heritage will be continued by future generations. Honor to his memory!

Szymon Szyrkowski vel Sęk

Sekretarz Stanu

***Above is translated using Microsoft Word and Mr. Robert Rusiecki,
and is overlaid over the original text***



3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008-3610

APOSTOLIC NUNCIATURE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

N° 17124/22

This N° Should Be Prefixed to the Answer

August 12th, 2022

Most Reverend
Patrick J. Zurek
Bishop of Amarillo
4512 NE 24th Avenue - PO Box 5644
AMARILLO, MD - 21201

Your Excellency:

In the temporary absence of Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio, I am asked to convey to you the following message signed by His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin on behalf of His Holiness Pope Francis, at the passing of Most Reverend John W. Yanta, your predecessor.

THE MOST REVEREND PATRICK J. ZUREK
BISHOP OF AMARILLO

HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS WAS SADDENED TO LEARN OF THE DEATH OF BISHOP EMERITUS JOHN W. YANTA, AND HE OFFERS HEARTFELT CONDOLENCES TO YOU AND TO THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS AND LAY FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE. IN COMMENDING THE LATE BISHOP'S SOUL TO THE LOVE AND MERCY OF CHRIST THE GOOD SHEPHERD, HIS HOLINESS JOINS IN YOUR PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING FOR HIS YEARS OF EPISCOPAL MINISTRY TO THE CHURCH IN AMARILLO, AS WELL AS HIS PASTORAL CONCERN FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND HIS SERVICE TO THE POLISH COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES. TO ALL PRESENT AT THE MASS OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL AND WHO MOURN BISHOP YANTA'S PASSING, THE HOLY FATHER CORDIALLY IMPARTS HIS BLESSING AS A PLEDGE OF PEACE AND CONSOLATION IN THE LORD JESUS.

CARDINAL PIETRO PAROLIN
SECRETARY OF STATE

Offering my personal prayers for the late Bishop and all the faithful of the Diocese of Amarillo, with kind regards, I remain

Yours respectfully,

Msgr. Séamus P. Horgan
Chargé d'affaires a.i.