



# NEWSLETTER No 27



EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND IN NEW ZEALAND

## ARRIVAL OF A NEW AMBASSADOR

December 2020

Ambassador Grzegorz Kowal presented the Letter of Credence to the New Zealand Governor-General The Right Honourable Dame Patsy Reddy, accrediting him as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Poland to New Zealand. The ceremony took place at the Government House in Wellington on 5 November 2020.

In his speech, Ambassador Kowal reminded of common values the Polish - New Zealand relations are traditionally based on, good political dialogue and historic ties. Governor-General Dame Patsy Reddy also acknowledged "the warm and cooperative relations that exist be-

tween our two countries".

Since assuming his mission, Ambassador Kowal held numerous meetings, with Poland's Honorary Consul in Christchurch and Auckland, with the Polish Communities in main cities as well as with the leaders of all the main Polish organisations in New Zealand. And with the representatives of various New Zealand institutions, NZ Government and Parliament and NZ MFAT, to name a few.

Ambassador Grzegorz Kowal is looking forward to strengthening bilateral cooperation between Poland and New Zealand.

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## MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE !



*Merry Christmas  
and  
a Happy New Year*



*Fryderyk Chopin on the Christmas Eve  
by Bartłomiej Wachacz*

**Best wishes for  
a Merry  
Christmas and  
a healthy &  
prosperous New  
Year 2021  
from  
the Embassy  
of the Republic  
of Poland  
in Wellington**

## POLISH CHRISTMAS CONCERT

On a beautiful Wellington afternoon of 14 December, the Polish Embassy hosted the Polish Christmas Concert featuring Polish classics and Christmas carols. Amongst the guests gathered were members of the Diplomatic Corp, Wellington Mayor A. Foster, Polish Community members, representatives of the New Zealand Parliament and academia. Opening the evening, Ambassador Grzegorz Kowal greeted all the guests and introduced some of the featured composers, such as Frederic Chopin and Ignacy Jan Paderewski. 2020 is a Year of Chopin, marking the 210th anniversary of the composer's birth. Unfortunately, this year's 18th International Chopin Competition to be held in Warsaw had to be postponed due to Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless compositions performed that night in Wellington were enjoyed by all. We felt really privileged to be able to host such

event in times when most other countries are banned from any gatherings. Beside Chopin and Paderewski, the programme included songs by M. Karłowicz and K. Szymanowski. The performers of the night were Gabriela Głapka, a Polish-born pianist currently living and working in Wellington, who received her Master's Degree with Distinction in Poland and has recently completed her PhD degree in music with the major performance component from Victoria University of Wellington as well as Barbara Paterson – a soprano singer and a soloist for choral societies around New Zealand, who has sung with numerous bands and for various New Zealand festivals and projects. The Christmas part of the concert featured Poland's famous "Wśród Nocnej Ciszy" and "Bóg się rodzi" while "Silent Night" was sung (by all) in Te Reo Maori, English and Polish.



## POLAND'S CANDIDATE FOR TOP JOB

On October 27th, 2020, Poland put forward the candidacy of the Minister of Climate and Environment Michał Kurtyka for the position of the OECD Secretary-General for the 2021-2026 tenure.

In the Polish government, initially as the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of the Environment, later as the Minister of Climate, Michał Kurtyka has proven to be primarily an expert - engineer and economist. He was responsible for the technological development and implementation of innovations in the oil and gas sector, as well as supervision of the state's participation in Polish energy companies. Internationally, Michał Kurtyka is best known for



his unique ability to build consensus. As COP24 President in 2018, he led all 196 members of the summit to successful adoption of the Katowice Rulebook, enabling the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Michał Kurtyka proposes to introduce the "New Growth" agenda which strives to enable a swift rebound after Covid-19 imposed economic contraction as well as to enhance well-being. In his program, Kurtyka urges to think beyond the immediate to emerge from the crisis with more resilient, sustainable economies built in a spirit of trust and cooperation. According to Kurtyka, rebuilding trust in international cooperation will be key to putting these ideas into practice.

## AMBASSADOR AT THE SECURITY FORUM



In the last days of July 2020, Ambassador Zbigniew Gniatkowski attended an event organised by the Asia-Pacific Security Innovation Forum in Queenstown. At the two-day-long conference with experts and Government representatives, the Polish Ambassador spoke of bio-defence from NATO and Polish perspective, including new challenges such as COVID-19 and

hybrid warfare. The conference held in Queenstown was attended by the National Party MP Simon O'Connor, the chair of the parliamentary committee of foreign affairs, defence and trade, as well as Dr Itzhak Gerberg, the Ambassador of Israel, among others. Several distinguished speakers, former advisors on defence and academics based overseas, took part in discussion virtually.

## GOLD CROSS OF MERIT FOR POLISH-JEWISH TIES

On 31 August, at the ceremony held at the Polish Embassy, Rick Sahar, a son of Polish-Jewish parents born in Poland received the Gold Cross of Merit of the Republic of Poland.

The ceremony gathered prominent representatives of Jewish and Polish communities, Israeli Ambassador, representatives of the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand, New Zealand academia and Wellington City Council. Present was also the President of the International Muslim Association of New Zealand Tahir Nawaz.

Ambassador Z. Gniatkowski shortly recalled joint Polish – Jewish history in Poland, the role of Polish Jews in the establishment of the very first Polish Association in New Zealand as well as some of the most tragic

events in the modern history which saw Jews and Poles as those paying the biggest sacrifices.

The recipient dedicated his award to the memory of his late parents. Rick Sahar was born into a family of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust, and after the war, via Sweden, travelled to the USA, where Rick was born and raised. Before the war, his father lived in Oświęcim, and his mother in Radomsko. As a teenager, Rick left for Israel, and at the end of the last century he moved to New Zealand. Rick is one of the volunteers of the Holocaust Centre in Wellington, an institution established in 2007 “to remember and honour those killed in the Holocaust - in particular, the families of survivors in New Zealand”.



## „KATYŃ” SCREENING

On 12 August 2020, at the Embassy Theatre in Wellington, the Polish Embassy hosted a special one-off screening of Andrzej Wajda's movie "Katyń" in order to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Katyń Massacre. Among the guests gathered at the event were numerous Heads of Missions resident in Wellington, representatives of New Zealand's universities and cultural institutions, members of the Polish Ex-Servicemen Association, Polish Association, Polish Community as well as history film lovers. Another special screening of „Katyń” was organised by the Polish Association in Christchurch on 15 July.

Taking this opportunity, we would like to recall Barbara Scrivens' presentation prepared earlier this year on Katyń Massacre. Her work recollects stories told by the Polish families in New Zealand who lost their loved ones in Katyń. In the 80th anniversary of those tragic events in remote Russian locations, Turkiewicz, Miotk, Jarka, Schwieters & Popławski Families shared their memories, testimonies, photographs and documents in the project initiated by the Polish Embassy: <https://polishhistorynewzealand.org/katyn-the-unspeakable-crime/>

## AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL

On 30 September, Ambassador Zbigniew Gniatkowski completed his diplomatic mission in New Zealand. On September 9, Ambassador and his wife, Polish Consul Agnieszka Kacperska were received by the Governor-General of New Zealand Dame Patsy Reddy and Sir David Gascoigne.

Numerous farewell meetings have taken place over the last weeks of Ambassador's mission including with representatives of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as members of the diplomatic corps

and representatives of academia and institutions that the Polish Embassy has maintained longstanding and friendly cooperation with. Ambassador also personally farewelled the Polish Communities in Christchurch, Auckland and Dunedin.

Ambassador Z. Gniatkowski began his mission in New Zealand on August 18, 2014. He presented his credentials on September 17, 2014. Apart from New Zealand, he was accredited in four Pacific island states - Kiribati, Tuvalu, Samoa and Tonga.



**MEETING WITH POLISH COMMUNITY LEADERS**

On 14 December 2020, Ambassador Grzegorz Kowal hosted the first meeting with the representatives of Polish Organisations from around New Zealand. Present at the meeting were representatives and board members and/or presidents of the Polish associations from Wellington, Christchurch, Auckland, POHOS from Dunedin, Polish Ex-Servicemen Association, Polonus (Christchurch), POLANZ and the Polish school in Auckland. Present were

also the current Honorary Consul from Auckland Bogusław Nowak and the former Honorary Consul and the founder of the Polish Heritage Museum Trust John Roy-Wojciechowski. The meeting served as an introduction of the new Polish Ambassador and the Polish Consul. Fruitful and constructive discussion was held on the two-way cooperation between the Polish organisations and the Embassy of the Republic of Poland, projects for 2021 and beyond.



**CONSUL WODZICKI REMEMBERED**

On 10 November 2020, Ambassador Grzegorz Kowal laid flowers at the grave of Kazimierz Wodzicki, Consul General of the Republic of Poland in 1941-45. Both, Consul and his wife Maria were instrumental in bringing a group of 733 Polish Pahiataua Children to New Zealand 76 years ago. Flowers were also laid by the President of the Polish Association in New Zealand Helena Fagan. The ceremony at the Karori Cemetery was attended by several of the original Pahiataua Children and the President of the Polish Ex-Servicemen Association in New Zealand Mariana Ceregra. Following the ceremony, all gathered were invited to the Polish Embassy's premises to share recollections and commemorate the upcoming Poland's Independence Day.



**POLISH PRESIDENCY OF V4**



For 30 years the Visegrad Group (V4) has enabled close cooperation between four Central European countries: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, which have neighbourly ties of having similar geopolitical background but also common history, tradition, culture and values. The V4 was established on February 15, 1991 (up until 1993 it functioned under the name of the Visegrad Triangle) so that their members could support one another in their aspirations to enter the European Union and NATO. Today Visegrad cooperation focuses on internal affairs in the region and takes place at the EU as well as other international organisations. It has resulted

in establishing, among others, the Visegrad Battlegroup, the Visegrad Patent Institute and the Visegrad Prize awarded by V4 ministers of culture. Moreover, the Visegrad Group is a platform for exchanging experiences between V4 societies. That is why, the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) was established to facilitate links between them. For more than 20 years now the IVF supports the realisation of common projects, grants, artistic and literary programs. The current cooperation format within the V4 is regulated by rotating, year-long presidencies. Until June 30, 2021 Poland is holding the V4's presidency, with Hungary taking over from July 1, 2021.

The competition organised by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Association of Polish Graphic Designers was addressed to citizens of the Visegrad Group countries. The competition task was to create a poster dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the V4 Group. The first prize went to Łukasz Zwolan (Poland).



## MEETING WITH POLANZ

On 19 December in the invitation. The first Auckland, the Polish meeting of Ambassador New Zealand Business Ambassador Kowal with the Association POLANZ members of POLANZ held their annual dinner was a great opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas for the future of the event upon upcoming 2021.



## AUCKLAND DECORATIONS

On 20 December, Ambassador Grzegorz Kowal participated in a gathering organised at the Polish House in Auckland by the Polish Association in Auckland. The Polish Ambassador awarded three distinguished members of the Polish community with Crosses of Merit of the Republic of Poland. Barbara Scrivens and Zbigniew Bojarski from Hamilton/Bay of Plenty received the Golden Cross of Merit and Krzysztof Wielgosz was decorated with the Silver Cross. Decorations were followed by the Polish Christmas custom of "opłatek" (wafer bread) sharing. Christmas and New Year wishes were exchanged between different generations of Auckland's Polish community.



Photos: Consulate of the Republic of Poland in Auckland FB page

## VISIT TO CHRISTCHURCH

On 15 July, Ambassador Z. Gniatkowski visited Christchurch where he took part in "Katyń" movie screening organised by the Polish Association in Christchurch to commemorate the Katyń Massacre. The event at the Lumière Cinemas was also attended by the Polish Honorary Consul Winsome Dormer, New Zealanders and members of the Polish Community. While in Christchurch, on 16 July, Ambassador decorated Margaret Copland with a badge of honor for Merits to the Polish Culture. Margaret is a descendant of Canterbury's First Polish Settlers of 1870s Michał and Katarzyna Gierszewski. Historian and professional herit-

age story-teller, Margaret for years has been presenting stories that focus on local history, ordinary folk, with meticulously researched presence of woman's view of history. A ceremony was held at Christchurch Turanga Library and hosted by Between the Waters Polish Legacy in NZ Trust in cooperation with the Polish Embassy, in the presence of Christchurch Deputy Mayor Andrew Turner, Honorary Consul of Poland, leaders of the Polish Community, members of various heritage and community organisations, Cantabrians, family and friends. Among attendees were also descendants of other Polish Early settlers to Canterbury.



## NEW POLISH STREET

On 20 September, Ambassador Z. Gniatkowski participated in the ceremony of unveiling of a new street honouring early Polish settlers in Mosgiel, in Otago. Pomerania Way has been inaugurated thanks to the efforts of the Polish Heritage of Otago and Southland Charitable Trust (POHOS). Apart from the Polish Ambassador, the event gathered Deputy Mayor Christine Garey, members of POHOS and Polish descendants. The new street was named after the region of Pomerania in Poland, from where some of the first Polish settlers arrived in Port Chalmers in 1872. Many of them settled in Waihola, East Taieri and Mosgiel. The ceremony followed a Mass that was held at the at the Polish Church in Broad Bay. The unveiling of Pomerania Way launched celebrations of 150th anniversary of the Polish Early Settlement in Otago to be observed in 2022.



## WELLINGTON CHRISTMAS MARKET

On 14 November, the Polish Association in New Zealand (Wellington) held the 4th edition of the Wellington Polish Christmas Market. The event was opened to the Polish and broader Wellington communities.

The Market was officially opened by the Polish Ambassador Grzegorz Kowal followed by an introduction from Mikołaj. Guests gathered enjoyed an excellent line up of Polish and Central and Eastern European entertainment arranged by market organiser Helena Fagan. Rick Sahar, MC for the day, introduced the performers: Orleńa Polish Dance Ensemble, Orzeł Dance Group and Lublin Dance Company; Koledzy, Las Bachateras (from Salsa Therapy Dance Studio), The Klezmer Rebs (Jewish music of Central and Eastern Europe), Bulgarian Dance Ensemble

Horo, Vox Ethos (Sounds from the Balkans and beyond) and Wellington Youth Choir who contributed a beautifully rendered selection of Christmas music.

Plenty of food was on offer, with famous pierogi, bigos and kielbasy, Dutch pancakes and even Cambodian noodles, plus a selection of Polish beers. The Association's Cukiernia offered tea, coffee, pączki and a range of baked goods.

In the hall, a range of stalls offered toys, jewellery, books, handmade cards, light-boxes, arts and crafts, miniatures, Polish liqueurs, baked goods, kielbasa, kiszona kapusta and zakwas do barszczu. Święty Mikołaj (Father Christmas) was also at home to greet children.

Once again this year, the Polish Embassy was proud to support this beautiful and popular event.



## 40 YEARS OF SOLIDARITY



31 August marked the 40th anniversary of the signing of the August Agreements and the establishment of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity", which contributed to the collapse of communism and an end to the world's cold war division. This would not have happened without the involvement of millions of Poles who dared to resist the injustice prevailing in their enslaved country and established "Solidarity". This mass civic movement, through which Poles decided to express their views and take responsibility for the fate of the country, had no match in Europe.

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of Solidarity Movement in Poland, as a reminder of great support received from New Zealand, we present a special publication prepared by Jacek Drecki from Auckland.

Earlier this year Jacek Drecki was awarded for his publication on Ignacy Paderewski's ties with New Zealand by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

Find the publication The New Zealand Chapter of the Peaceful Solidarity Movement here: <https://www.gov.pl/web/newzealand/the-new-zealand-chapter-of-the-peaceful-polish-solidarity-movement>

*EXCERPTS: (...) Unfortunately, despite great degree of awareness of the Polish fate, the official stance of the New Zealand government was to do what Great Britain did, and recognize only the Warsaw communist regime. Poland was to be treated as a Soviet dominion, not to be interfered or engaged with by any strong political stance or action. The Soviet Union was too powerful to be questioned. In such a political environment not much could be done for Poland. This, of course, did not help the passionate Polish communities here. (...)*

*(...) It was certainly the case in New Zealand. Upon the signing of the August 1980 agreements, a Television New Zealand reporter and film-crew made a surprise visit to the Auckland Polish Catholic Church. There they filmed a procession and conducted an impromptu interview with Mrs Wanda Ellis, a very well-known member of the Polish community, who provided up-to-date comments on the Gdańsk events. The footage was screened later that day during the main nightly news bulletin, along with a report on the situation in Poland. (...)*

*(...) Calls by Polish Bishops to the international community for help in easing the particularly painful food crisis were heard in New Zealand. Polish organizations in Wellington and Auckland, along with the New Zealand Red Cross and Catholic Church, were the first to respond. The results of their efforts were spectacular. The 'Food for Poland' appeal was a joint initiative of Wellington's Polish Association and the New Zealand Red Cross. Within a short time, generously donated funds allowed the purchase and transport of 20 tonnes of cheese to Poland. The cheese, valued at \$34,500 was sent by the New Zealand Dairy Board from its Hamburg facility in May 1981.*

*Money-raising efforts intensified when the Auckland Polish Association became involved in the appeal. The second lot of bulk New Zealand dairy products was purchased, this time with a value of \$56,000, and again transported from Hamburg to Poland, in June. This was done after assurances had been received from the deliverers and receivers of the first consignment, that the food had arrived and been distributed to the Polish people, not the Polish government. Only the Polish and New Zealand Red Cross organisations, the Solidarity Free Trade Union and Catholic Caritas organisation were authorised to distribute the goods. (...)*

## JOHN PAUL II REMEMBERED

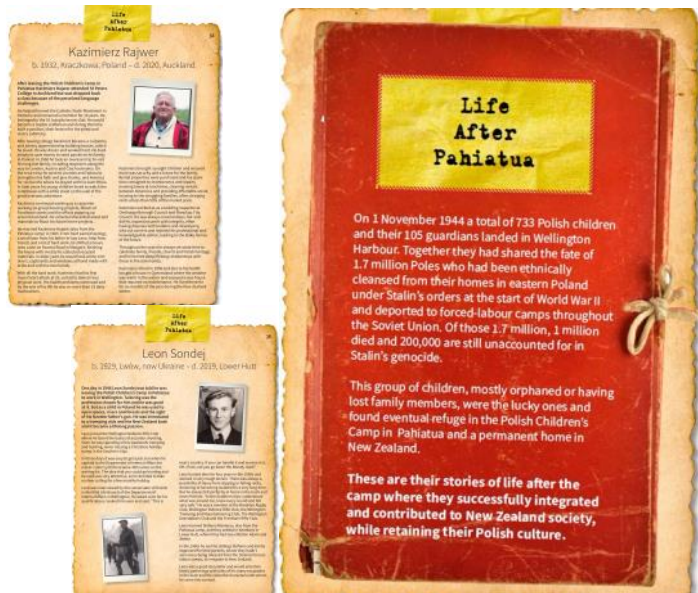
This Polish Embassy's presentation "He didn't forget us" has been prepared on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of birth of Karol Wojtyła, who was later known as Pope John Paul II. This edition features recollections of the Polish Pope's visit to New Zealand in 1986 by the members of the Polish Community in New Zealand. It also highlights John Paul II's impact on the historic events in Poland.

We would like to thank all the contributors who shared their memories and valuable photographs of this special event.

John Paul II was the first and so far the only Pope to visit New Zealand. In 1986 he paid brief visits to Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

Additionally, to commemorate Karol Wojtyła's 100th birthday the Polish Embassy together with Victoria University of Wellington has worked on a reprint of a limited publication with the excerpts of his poem "Thinking My Country" in Polish, English and Te Reo Māori.

Presentation can be found here: <https://www.gov.pl/web/newzealand/recollections-of-pope-john-paul-iis-visit-to-new-zealand>



## LIFE AFTER PAHIATUA

The latest, largely extended version of the Polish Embassy's presentation "Life After Pahiatua" highlighting personal stories and profiles of members of the Polish Children of Pahiatua is now available. Presentation highlights integrating of Polish Children into New Zealand way of life, while maintaining their Polish culture and passing it down through the generations. Their integration is a success story. Polish Children, invited 76

years ago, made New Zealand their home and positively contributed to the country's development. The work has been edited and designed by Adam Manterys.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this presentation.

You can access the presentation here: <https://www.gov.pl/web/newzealand/life-after-pahiatua---extended-presentation>

## 100 YEARS OF BATTLE OF WARSAW

On 15 August 2020 the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw was observed – a culminating point of the Polish-Soviet War (1919-1920) and one of the most decisive events in the history of Poland, Europe, and the world.

When independent Poland was being re-born in 1918, its existence became endangered by the Soviet Russia which, propagating self-determination of nations, in fact aimed at imposing its totalitarian communist ideology upon them. Poland was the first step on the path towards a further conquest.

However, in August 1920, not just Poland's but also entire Europe's future was determined by the Battle of Warsaw of 1920, victorious for the Polish Armed Forces. Not only did the battle bring defeat to the Red Army, but it also suppressed the attempts to sovietise European nations by the forceful, armed spread of the world proletarian revolution. At the time, the Polish

Army, thanks to the determination and consistency of its soldiers, and the talent of its chief commanders, saved Europe from being engulfed in war yet again. The losses on the Polish side in the 1919-1920 war with the Bolsheviks were, as for that time, heavy – a hundred thousand dead, including many killed in action, or missing, and twice as much wounded. Repelling the Bolsheviks' attack on the Poland's capital was a landmark moment for reinforcing the independent Poland as well as other, newly established national states in Central Europe. It averted the risk of the collapse of the Versailles system and provided Europe with an opportunity for attempting peaceful international co-existence.

The Battle of Warsaw sends a universal message that we need to counteract dictators and that making sacrifices is effective in protecting freedom.



## POLISH CHRISTMAS EVE TRADITIONS

Like in most Central European countries, Christmas in Poland is a quaint and much-beloved affair. However, while Germanic traditions, like decorating trees, have spread so far as to be unsurprising, Polish customs remain delightfully distinctive.

Most of the Polish Christmas celebrations take place on 24th December, and even though the day isn't an official public holiday in Poland, to many Poles it is one of the most significant and family-oriented dates in the calendar. Many institutions stop working earlier than usual on the day of Christmas Eve, which is usually celebrated with a family dinner at home.



### WAITING FOR THE FIRST STAR TO APPEAR IN THE SKY



Many Poles wait until the first star appears in the sky before sitting down to eat on 24th December. This tradition commemorates the Star of Bethlehem, which according to the New Testament guided the Wise Men to the birthplace of

Christ. Nowadays, with so many satellites circling around the Earth and reflecting light, it's sometimes tricky to adhere to this tradition, but many families do their best.

### SHARING AN OPLATEK

*Oplatek* is an unleavened wafer made of flour and water embossed with a religious image. Every person attending the Christmas celebration gets one and then shares pieces of it with everyone else. This is accompanied by exchanges of good wishes and occurs before sitting down to eat. This tradition is linked to the breaking of bread at the Last Supper.

### SPEAKING WITH ANIMALS

According to an old Polish legend, animals are granted the gift of speech on Christmas Eve as a reward for their role in welcoming Jesus on earth. As a result, children often try to extract a word or two out of bewildered family pets.



### LEAVING ONE EMPTY PLACE AT THE TABLE

Once everybody sits down at the table to taste the delicious Christmas dishes you might notice that one place is still empty. Many Poles still leave an empty place set at the table in case a person down on luck should show up and ask for shelter. While this rarely happens nowadays, the tradition nevertheless requires that lone strangers be taken in and treated as family.

### NOT EATING MEAT

Christmas in Poland is a pescatarian's dream. In strict keeping with old Catholic tradition, Poles usually abstain from meat and hard liquor on Christmas Eve. However, wine and fish are acceptable, and the latter is abundantly featured in traditional dishes.



### PUTTING HAY BENEATH THE TABLECLOTH

If you find some hay beneath the tablecloth at a Polish Christmas Eve celebration, don't assume your hosts did a poor job of tidying up. The hay is there on purpose, as a way of remembering that, according to the Bible, the newborn Jesus was put in a manger to rest.



### PREPARING 12 DISHES

A traditional Polish Christmas Eve dinner consists of 12 dishes. One for each month of the new year. Some claim that one should try every dish to secure good luck throughout the upcoming twelve-month period. Classic Polish Christmas dishes include, amongst others, cabbage and mushroom *pierogi* (dumplings) and the poppy seed cake known as *makowiec*.



*via culture.pl*

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Polish Embassy in Wellington



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