

## **The First Steps of Religious Life in Canada**

The city of Winnipeg played a leading role not only in Ukrainian settlement but it also became the centre of religious - church development in Manitoba as well as in all of Canada.

The first years in Canada were difficult for our pioneers in the material sense and no less so in the religious aspects of their lives.

For the most part, the Ukrainian immigrants were Ukrainian Catholics from the western regions of Ukraine - Halychyna; only about 20% were Orthodox, mainly from Bukovyna. In Halychyna the people had left well developed and organized church communities where almost every town and village had its own priest and regular church services. In Canada, the immigrant was faced with entirely opposite circumstances. The faith and steadfast allegiance of these pioneers to their Ukrainian Church is truly noteworthy considering that during the first, most difficult years they were under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church whose clergy at that time had little understanding or knowledge of the Ukrainian rite, while at the same time various different religious sects attempted to assimilate them. It is very moving to read memoirs of pioneers in which they recall their painful longing for their own priests. Since none were available, the people would gather by themselves outdoors and under the expansive prairie sky and would pray before icons they had brought from their homeland and hung on branches or improvised altars of tree stumps. On the sites of these gathering the pioneers began to build their chapels in the same way they built their simple abodes. They used logs and filled the spaces with dry grass, mud, or moss mixed with clay. These first, frail buildings did not withstand the passage of time and like the communal prayers before icons hung outdoors, they exist only in memory. The same fate befell the wooden "Crosses of Freedom" which were erected by our pioneers in thanksgiving for the new found freedom which was longed for by generations of subjugated Ukrainians in the homeland. One such "Cross of Freedom" was erected in Terebovlia on April 12, 1897. It was reconstructed and dedicated on April 30, 1966, at the historical site in Terebovlia. To this site was also transported the well preserved St. Michael church which was built on in 1899 in Volkivtsi - Mink River.

The promoter and guardian of the Ukrainian immigration to Canada, Dr. Joseph Oleskiv, during a visit to the United States requested Rev. Nestor Dmytriv, who at that time was the pastor and editor of the newspaper "Svoboda" in Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania, to assist in obtaining a priest for Ukrainian Canadians. At that time, obtaining clergy from Ukraine was virtually impossible as there were few unmarried priests and married priests were frowned upon by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese. The Basilian priests who would have been most welcome, were already overtaxed with the administering to the spiritual needs of the Ukrainian immigrants in Brazil.

Thus it fell upon Rev. Nestor Dmytriv to come to Canada himself and he became the first Ukrainian priest to visit the Ukrainian pioneers. He arrived in Winnipeg on April 4, 1897, and administered the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion in the Immigration Home. From there he went to Terebovlia, now Valley River, near Dauphin where he celebrated Mass and where was erected a "Cross of Freedom" which was mentioned earlier. The following week Rev. Dmytriv celebrated Mass in Stuartburn and on Palm

Sunday he blessed the willows for this community. He then visited the faithful in Alberta and returned back to the United States. In autumn of the same year, Rev. Dmytriv returned to Canada. On this visit he established parishes in Stuartburn on August 1 and in Terebovlia on August 8 and continued this work in Alberta. Following Rev. Dmytriv, Rev. Paul Tymkevych, also from the United States, ministered in Alberta for a period of six months. But it wasn't until October 21, 1899, that Rev. Damascin Polivka, arrived in Winnipeg from Europe. At that time there were over 150 Ukrainian families in Winnipeg who were under the spiritual ministry of the Roman Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception and who were contributing financially to the building of the Church of the Holy Ghost which was authorized by Archbishop Langevin to serve the Polish and Ukrainian Catholics. However, these Ukrainian families did not abandon hope of having their own separate church and their own priest as they had in their homeland. For them Rev. D. Polivka personified divine providence needed to realize their hopes. Unfortunately, there developed a conflict between the Ukrainian Community and the clergy of the Holy Ghost Church, the Rev. Brothers Kulavych, who were supported by Archbishop Langevin, and Rev. Polivka returned to the United States near the end of the year. (See the "Jubilee Book of the Parish of St. Nicholas" beginning on pg. 26) During his short stay Rev. Polivka visited the faithful in Stuartburn and in spite of great obstacles and difficulties in Winnipeg, was able to assist the people in purchasing property for the building of their own church which they did shortly after his departure. (See the Cathedral of the Saints Vladimir and Olga.) There should be noted that in addition to Ukrainian priests, Father Achilles Delaere, a Belgian Latin Rite Redemptorist priest, came to Brandon, Manitoba, on October 11, 1899, and ministered to the Ukrainian faithful here. On January 12, 1904, Father Delaere moved to Yorkton, Saskatchewan, changed to the Ukrainian Rite and initiated the founding of the Ukrainian Branch of the Redemptorist Order. The next Ukrainian priest that administered to the spiritual needs of the pioneers in the early years was Rev. Ivan Zaklynsky. He began his work in Alberta in 1900 and continued on to Manitoba where he consecrated the existing churches in Gonor, Stuartburn, Sifton. He was the first priest to celebrate Mass in the newly built St. Nicholas Church in Winnipeg. (Later named Saints Vladimir and Olha.) Unfortunately, Rev. Zaklynsky did not remain for long in Winnipeg before leaving Canada. During this period there was tremendous pressure on the Ukrainian Catholics by the Russian Orthodox Mission which, coupled with the hostile attitude of the Latin Rite clergy, led to misunderstandings among the people and divisions within the community.

This situation and the continuing lack of spiritual guardianship of the faithful in Canada deeply troubled the Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky and he tried to arrange for a visit to them. However, his efforts were in vain, for after a long waiting period, he did not receive permission from "Propaganda Fide" to leave for Canada. As an alternative, he wrote pastoral letters to the faithful in Canada and authorized his personal secretary Rev. Wasyl Zholdak to represent him in Canada.

Rev. W. Zholdak arrived in Winnipeg at the end of September, 1901. Within a short time he visited the congregations in the settlements of Sifton, Fishing River, Gilbert Plains, Valley River, Dauphin, Fork River, Stuartburn and elsewhere, and from time to time, he served the faithful in Winnipeg. Early in 1902 he left for Alberta where, as in Manitoba, he visited existing congregations. On June 17 of that year he left Edmonton and along with Rev. Alphonsis Zana of the Oblate Fathers he returned to Lviv where he presented a

detailed report of his visits with the Ukrainian people in Canada to Metropolitan Sheptytsky. In response to this report, Metropolitan Sheptytsky made concerted efforts to arrange for the departure of Basilian priests to the faithful in Canada who received only occasional ministry as in the above mentioned communities or none at all.

As a result to these efforts Rev. W. Zholdak returned to Canada at the end of October, 1902, and was appointed the Apostolic Administrator for the Ukrainian Catholics in Manitoba and all of north-western Canada. With Rev. Zholdak came three Basilian priests, Platonid Filas, Sozont Dydyk, Anton Strotsky, Brother Yarema Yanishevsky and four Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate, Ambrosia, Taida, Emilia and Isydora. They all arrived in Edmonton on November 1, 1902, while Rev. Zholdak remained in Winnipeg where he served St. Nicholas parish and the existing parish-communities (colonies) in Manitoba for two years until his return to Europe in November, 1904. Next to arrive were two Basilian priests, Rev. Matey Hura and Navkraty Kryzhanovsky, who came to Winnipeg from Lviv on November 15, 1903. Near the end of January, 1904, Rev. M. Hura began his pastoral work at St. Nicholas Parish. One of his first tasks was to oversee the construction of a new church building which was located across the street from the "little" church, and which was built on property donated by Archbishop Langevin who also contributed financially to its construction. The new St. Nicholas Church was consecrated on January 15, 1905, and Rev. Hura remained as pastor here until his departure in 1907 to Alberta. Rev. Atanazy Fylypiw, OSBM, replaced Rev. Hura at St. Nicholas parish upon his arrival to Canada in 1905. After Rev. P. Filas returned to Halychyna, Rev. Fylypiw assumed the role of superior at the monastery in Mundare.

It was not until 1910 that Metropolitan Sheptytsky was able to fulfill his and the faithful's wishes to visit them in their settlements in Canada. This opportunity was provided by the International Eucharistic Congress that was held in Montreal that year and which the Metropolitan attended. On October 8, the Metropolitan arrived in Winnipeg where he officiated at Solemn Divine Services and was joyfully greeted as the father of the Ukrainian Catholic Church and the sole authoritative representative of her faithful in the settlements. The Metropolitan went on to meet with congregations in Manitoba and other provinces. In addition to his work among the faithful, the Metropolitan also made time to meet with the Roman Catholic and government officials to discuss urgent matters pertaining to the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada. Upon his return to Lviv, the Metropolitan maintained his contact with the Roman Catholic bishops and sent to them memorandums highlighting the desire and urgent need of the Ukrainian people in Canada to have their own church leadership and jurisdiction. These appeals were substantiated by statistics which illustrated the deep faith and commitment of the people to their own rite. They showed that out of ninety-three churches in existence, one was signed over to the Latin bishop's corporation, ten to the Basilian Order, ten as Greek Catholic parishes and seventy-two were unassigned and were awaiting their own bishop. These statistics, along with the constant pressure of various religious sects, indicated the possibility of a schism from the Apostolic Church and changed the attitude of the opponents of a separate Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada. This also influenced the Apostolic Seat to revoke the principle established at the Fourth Lateral[sic] Synod in 1215 where it was stated that in the western territories, Catholics of the eastern rite would fall under the jurisdiction of the Latin rite and Latin rite Catholics in the east would fall under the jurisdiction of eastern rite bishops. Thus the Ukrainian Church in the United States and Canada were

included in the Western sphere. (Prof. Mykola Chubaty, “The Significance of the Metropolitanate”, *Progress*, 13, 10, 1988.) However, the Ukrainian Catholics who were organized in parish communities and were supported by cultural halls associated with the parishes, were able to breach this canon law and obtain their own authority in the person of Bishop Nykyta Budka. It can be said that the arrival of the first Ukrainian bishop brought to an end the first and most difficult period for the Ukrainian people in their struggles to establish the Ukrainian Catholic Church. This accomplishment exemplifies for future generations that united struggles for justice bring God’s blessing and rewards.

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