

ST. MARY'S UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC PARISH

Sudbury, Ontario

Rev. Fr. Theodor Pryjma

The Ukrainian people began settling in Sudbury at the turn of the century. They came here seeking a better life than they could hope for in their native Ukrainian lands or in other parts of Canada. As their numbers increased, there arose in them the desire to organize a national and church community.

The ecclesiastical history of Ukrainians in Sudbury can be divided into four distinct periods, each with its own characteristic features.

The First Period

Without a doubt, the most interesting period is the first, even if it is the most modest one. In 1909, a group of people, headed by its parish priest—Father Timothy Wasylevych, built a small wooden church in Copper Cliff. The faithful of Sudbury, yearning for spiritual guidance, flocked to it as well. Church services were celebrated, the priest administered the Sacraments and provided counseling to those who had arrived from the old country, and to those who, in strange circumstances, sought to better themselves. They wanted to earn some money to send to their families to buy some land, and then return home to be the masters in their own house, instead of wandering about, looking for work.

There were few who, having earned some money, attempted to establish them here. However, their scant earnings did not provide a comfortable life. Obviously, the priests too, in those circumstances, lived poorly and were often destitute.

Similar conditions prevailed under Father Carl Yeremia, who only used to commute here to hold services, and who later returned to Galacia; under Father Basil Gegeychuk who remained here through the four years of World War I (1914-1918)—longer than any other priest during this first period; and under Father Basil Wyniarsky, who already resided in Sudbury and only commuted to Copper Cliff.

Meanwhile, in 1919, Canada found itself in a crisis. The people drifted to other cities in search of jobs. Some returned home. The small wooden church in Copper Cliff was deserted. The people who came to this area chose to settle in Sudbury and not in the town of Copper Cliff.

The Second Period

With the arrival of Father Nicholas Shumsky in Sudbury the second period of the Church community began. There was still no Ukrainian church here. The Divine Liturgy was celebrated in other Catholic churches, frequently in a hospital, a school, in private residences (as in a house on the site of the former Michaud Drug Store) and even in a basement (in the old building of the Sudbury Star).

The enterprising spirit of the new pastor overcame all difficulties, for the first time in this city Ukrainian community life was organized at the parish. The drama group presented plays- Mr. I. Fedorchuk conducted the first Ukrainian classes in this area, the newly elected parish council organized picnics to raise funds for the building of a church, the need for which was keenly felt. The parish began making preparations for the canonical visitation, which was to be conducted by Bishop Nykyta Budka (now declared Blessed).

Father Joseph Bala continued to work along these lines also. He was the first to hold a bazaar which raised the impressive (for those times) sum of nine hundred dollars. It was during his tenure as pastor that the first parish mission was held in our city. At this time a plot of land for a future church was purchased for four thousand dollars, raised by Father Bala and his predecessors.

Also at that time (under Father Shumsky, Father Bala and later) the faithful encountered yet another problem, perhaps the most difficult to contend with—the illusion of Communism. Some of our own people, deceived by the Red smoke screen, blindly following the instigations and inducements of Moscow's agents, not really knowing what they were doing, began their campaign, resorting indiscriminately to all possible means. One of the pastors of the time described their activities thus:

“They would stand on the steps of the hall in which services were being held for the parishioners, and would not let them go inside; they would disturb the divine services, spread all kinds of false accusations about the priest and the parishioners, and revile Faith and the Church. When they were brought to court they terrorized the witnesses with threats and instigations so as to prevent them from testifying.”

Our Church experienced its most difficult times from 1923 to 1928, when there was no Ukrainian priest in Sudbury. The faithful attended the Roman rite Catholic churches (English and French), but in most cases they forgot about God and their purpose on earth. However, in those formidable times the Lord did not leave our community without His care. Here is what one of the pioneers of the time wrote:

“The situation was very bad. The Father Traynor (the pastor of the English Catholic church) came to me with this joyful news: ‘Write to your Bishop and tell him to come, because I’ve managed to obtain \$20,000 for you from the International Nickel Company for the building of a church.’ I thanked him and, heartened by this news I wrote to Father Oleksiw, the Apostolic Visitor (Bishop Nykyta was then in Rome). Obviously, we did not fail to take advantage of this opportunity. In a short time a small church rose on our lot.”

The first pastor in the new church was Father Nicholas Bartman (1928). These times are noted for the cooperation between the church and the members of the Ukrainian veteran organization; the Church accommodated them and they, along with Her, contributed much in vanquishing Communism in

Sudbury and the vicinity. Indeed, from that time, the Communists were incapable of conducting any larger activities openly. The Hetman organization played a significant role in helping the Church.

Religious activity was given a serious blow by the world crisis—times of mass unemployment and poverty. Perhaps that was the reason why the work of the new priests, as Father John Koltsun and Father Peter Kamenecky encountered such great obstacles. During the pastorship of Father Michael Irkha, a chandelier and several icons were acquired for the church, and under Father Paul Suliatsky a residence was built, joined to the church (1944). The late Father Michael Horoshko served our faithful for a short while and was succeeded by the late Father Michael Pelech (1945-1947), who already was able to conduct normal pastoral activities.

The Third Period

In November, 1947, Father Basil Dzurman took over the parish. He comprehended the situation and began to work intensely and eagerly, and gained very notable achievements. He marked out a precise plan and strove to realize it, disregarding all hindrances. During his time a large number of newcomers arrived in Sudbury, increasing the pace of activity. With that, however, many difficulties arose, as they did everywhere at that time. The new pastor worked at removing all obstacles in the building up of the parish so that his work would embrace all the faithful and all aspects of their religious and national life. With total enthusiasm and youthful energy he organized all levels of the community, and concentrated his attention mainly on the youth and the children.

To that end the parish bought a beautiful farm on a lake where in a short time a series of buildings sprung up, which provided accommodation for the children during the summer holiday vacation camps. This “Villa Maria” became the pride not only of Sudbury but of all Canada at the time. Festivals were also held there, and they provided the finest diversion for the faithful of all ages during the hot summer months.

Father Dzurman also expanded the Ukrainian school, in which Mr. H. Satsiuk taught, and in 1951 he brought in the Missionary Sisters of Christian Charity, who took over the school in Sudbury and the outlying districts. At the beginning his assistant was Father George Karpinsky, and then father Eugene Bobownyk.

In 1948, a mixed church choir was organized among the newcomers, which was directed by Mr. I. Lew, and later by the energetic and talented Mr. Y. Hrobelsky. Subsequently Father Bobownyk became the choir director while Hrobelsky organized a men’s church choir—the first in the area. At the same time a drama circle was organized, and it presented several plays, some on a respectable level.

In 1953, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the building of the church, it was renovated and painted in the Ukrainian style. The artist, Mr. T. Baran, made it the pride of all of us. A large house was bought near the church for a planned Ukrainian Catholic youth center. Father Dzurman organized a local branch

of the Brotherhood of Ukrainian Catholics, which played a prominent role in the religious and national life of Ukrainians in Sudbury.

In 1956, Father Dzurman was succeeded by Father E. Bobownyk who, notwithstanding his age, endeavored to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor and persistently and eagerly worked on fostering the religious and community life of his flock. In his highly respected position as pastor of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, he was seen practically everywhere there was a need to bring help or to represent his community. He enjoyed great affection and esteem both of his own people and of those outside the parish family. He organized and directed a girl's choir—the first of its kind in Sudbury. A few years later in 1962, Father Bobownyk was made pastor in Niagara Falls, and was succeeded in Sudbury by Father Simbalist, whose assistants were first, Father M. Bosey, and then Father S. Gar.

In 1965, Father Theodore Pryjma was appointed pastor of the parish in Sudbury and head of the Northern Deanery. From that time onward, he had the following priests as assistants: the late Father W. Werbicki, Father B Zvarych, Father M. Yakymyshyn and the late Father M. Balagus, who was also the pastor in the neighboring church of St. Michael's in Coniston. The Dean, Father T. Pryjma, having been the pastor in Coniston for close to ten years, was well known and respected in Sudbury. Although of a quiet and modest disposition, he was full of energy, determination and steadfastness, commencing his work in Sudbury with earnest dedication.

It was during his term as pastor that one of the most important decisions in the history of the Ukrainian ecclesiastical community in Sudbury had to be made. The city administration was working on a plan to rebuild the center of the city, which included the location of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. According to the city plan our church had to be relocated, because a large commercial complex, a hotel and other buildings were to be built on its site. Negotiations regarding the new location for the church and the question of monetary compensation got under way with the city administration. As a result, the parish was given a new site, more than an acre of land, on the city's main artery at the corner of Notre Dame and Louis Streets, in the immediate heart of the city.

Because the construction of the buildings planned by the city had begun, our church was dismantled in the summer of 1969. Church services were then held in temporary quarters until the day when the doors to the new church were opened. The new church, one of the finest edifices in Sudbury, became the pride not only of the Ukrainian Catholic community but of the whole city.

The Fourth Period

On January 7, 1971, on the Feast of the Nativity, the first solemn Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the new church. Architecturally, the new church belongs to the finest Ukrainian churches on the continent. The plans for the church were made by a local parishioner and native of Sudbury—architect John Stefura, who managed to unite artistically the traditional elements of Ukrainian church architecture with the modern, taking into account the natural setting of Sudbury as well. He thus created a beautiful

example of Ukrainian church architecture, which is at the same time organically one with the local terrain.

The parish residence is joined to the church; beneath the church and the residence there is the parish auditorium, as well as spacious classrooms, a credit union office, meeting rooms for parish organizations and a kitchen. The church is 100 feet long, 60 feet wide and 41 feet high. The entire complex measures 100 feet by 126 feet.

The parish rectory is not only one of the finest in Canada, but is also distinguished by its Ukrainian character. It is adorned with Ukrainian paintings, embroideries and other works of art. The current value of the parish property, which is the new church structure, the church grounds and the parish camp, Villa Maria exceeds 2.5 million dollars. The Building Committee, headed by Dr. S.J. Kosar, was actively engaged in close cooperation with Father Pryjma in the selling of the old church and the building of the new one.

There were various active organizations in the parish, as the Ukrainian Catholic Women's League, the Brotherhood of Ukrainian Catholics, the Ukrainian Catholic youth, the Altar Boys, the Credit Union, the Association of St. Nicholas, and the Ukrainian school, in which religion, the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian dancing is taught. All these organizations contributed to the development of the parish and to paying off its debt, each according to its means.

At the beginning of June, 1972, the Sudbury parish experienced a rare and joyous event when Patriarch and Cardinal Josyf Slipyj, visiting Canada for the second time, came to Sudbury. A special committee had been formed for the occasion, headed by Father Pryjma. The faithful filled the church to capacity when this extraordinary person, a staunch martyr for the Christian Faith, was celebrating Divine Liturgy and spoke to the people. In recent years, the Sudbury parish has contributed more than \$20,000 for the needs of the Church and His Beatitude.

In the evening of June 1, the parish welcomed its highest hierarch at a banquet at which Father Pryjma was officially elevated to the dignity of a Canon. The parishioners received this announcement with great joy and gave their pastor a thunderous standing ovation. The Patriarch was pleased with his visit to Sudbury, and with the parish's varied activities, and particular with its head-Father T. Pryjma.

The celebrations came and went, but everyday needs called for continued work, perseverance and further development. To this end Father Pryjma formed a Parish Council, consisting of twenty-five members, which gradually assumed its obligations and soon became an important part of the parish. The Council is headed by one of the outstanding parishioners Dr. Y. S. Kosar.

The parishioners showed their appreciation for the work of their energetic pastor and celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of his priesthood with a grand banquet, perhaps the greatest and most splendid banquet ever held in Sudbury. Hundreds of letters and telegrams were received from the highest ecclesiastical and secular authorities, and the banquet hall was unable to accommodate all those who wanted, by their presence to express their esteem and gratitude to their pastor.

The Ukrainian Catholic Women's League

No sooner was the parish in Sudbury organized than the more concerned parishioners, under the direction of Father N. Bartman, began organizing the women of the parish. In 1929, a Sisterhood was formed, whose purpose was to engage the women in parish work. The beginnings were difficult. In Sudbury there were hardly twenty Ukrainian families who understood our task and cooperated with us. It was during the depression, when our people were unemployed and suffered want that a small number of women gathered for their first meeting and elected the first executive of the Sisterhood. The first president was Mrs. T. Nazar.

The women organized meetings and discussions on relevant topics in the parish hall and in private homes. On these occasions they took up collections for the church and parish. With these funds they acquired a main altar for the church, which was later donated to the parish in Coniston when a new hand-carved one was bought in 1957.

Subsequent presidents of the Sisterhood were Mmes. Lapchysky, Tataryn and Kuhmey. In 1947, under the pastorship of Father M. Pelech, the Sisterhood was reorganized into a branch of the Ukrainian Catholic Women's League (UCWL) of St. Olga. The first president was Mrs. Obodiak. She was followed by Mmes. D. Shenkaruk, V. Husiak, M. Yasiuk, L. Shach, I. Boyuk, A. Semeniuk, V. Shewchuk, J. Hrobelsky, S. Falat and H. Woloshyn. The activities of the league intensified with the arrival of Father B. Dzurman in Sudbury and with the coming of the new immigration.

In its activities the Sudbury UCWL concentrated on bringing moral support and material help to the sick and the needy; on cultural and educational work; on extensive work for the benefit of children and Ukrainian mothers; and on work for the Church and parish. UCWL members also joined the parish choir and drama circle. They held book and Ukrainian art displays, festival gathering, concerts, lectures, annual teas and the like.

The Social Care Committee of the UCWL conducted collections and provided assistance to displaced persons in Europe and to the hospitalized. Several collections of clothing and money were made for the needy in Germany, Yugoslavia and Brazil, in particular for Christmas and Easter presents for the children. The League also supported the local Ukrainian School, maintained a kindergarten in Germany, and financed a room at Mount Mary Academy in Ancaster, Ontario.

The Sudbury UCWL made substantial contribution to help pay off the debt on the new church, providing over \$100,000 in a four year period, and furnished the kitchen in the church hall at the cost of \$25,000.

From 1953 to 1963 the Missionary Sisters were stationed in the parish. Their work included conducting the kindergarten and teaching in the Ukrainian school. The UCWL help them in all their work with dedication and generosity.

The UCWL provides a scholarship for a student in Brazil, and for many years has granted a monetary award to a local student with the best scholastic achievement. Other UCWL activities include preparing parish dinners, feast-day banquets, Christmas Suppers, Easter Dinners, memorial celebrations, and the sale of pyrohy-varenyky (dumplings). The UCWL members also look after the church linens and the cleaning and decorating of the church.

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